MAY 1948

ADVENTURE

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OPERATION DYNAMITE by **JAMES NORMAN**

25¢

Adventure

MAY

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by **H. FREDRIC YOUNG**

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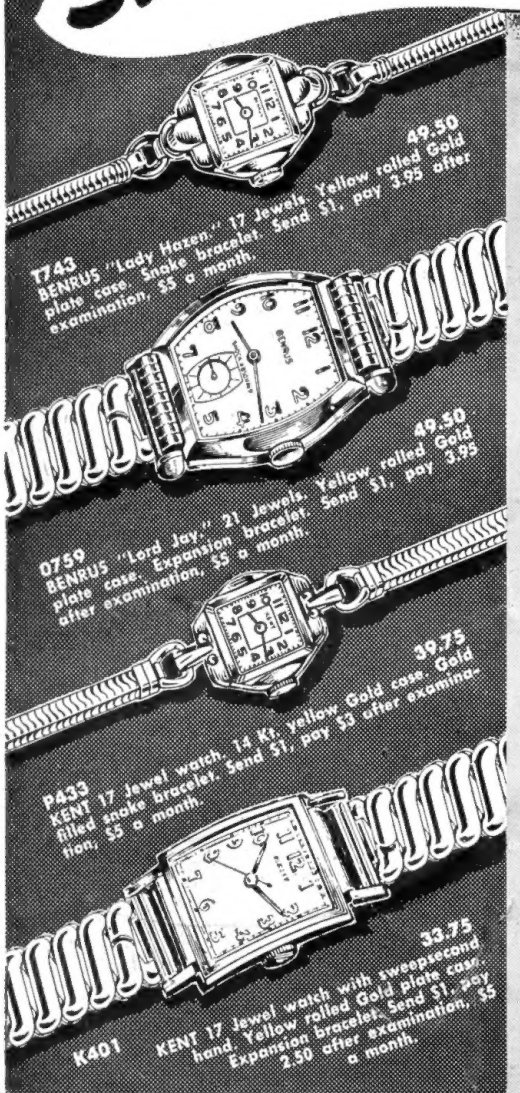

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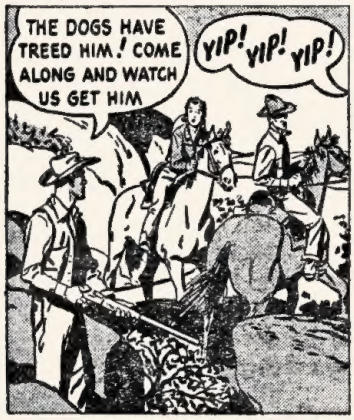

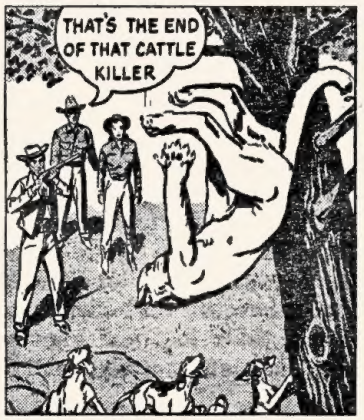

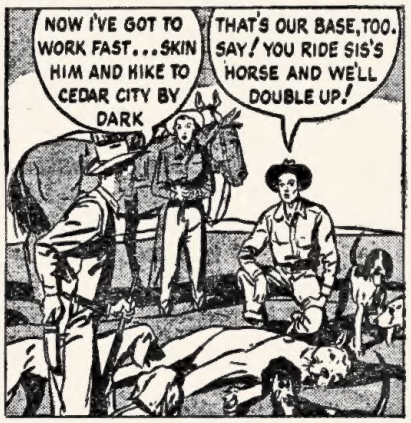

DINNER? THANKS, BUT I'D BETTER DRIVE TO THE RANCH. I'M HARDLY IN SHAPE TO APPEAR IN PUBLIC
DON'T WORRY, WE CAN CLEAN UP IN MY ROOM
HOTEL
LATER

I SURE WISH YOU'D ACCEPT. THERE'S PLENTY OF ROOM AT THE RANCH AND . . .
WE STILL HAVE A WEEK, SIS. HOW ABOUT IT?
I'D LOVE IT
HE'S SO HANDSOME!

YOU SKIM OFF TOUGH BEARD SLICK AS SILK . . . GET BETTER SHAVES AND MORE OF 'EM . . . WITH THIN GILLETTES. NO OTHER LOW-PRICED BLADE COMPARES WITH 'EM FOR KEENNESS AND LONG LIFE. THIN GILLETTES FIT YOUR RAZOR EXACTLY, TOO . . . NEVER SCRAPE OR IRRITATE YOUR FACE AS DO MISFIT BLADES. ALWAYS ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES
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◆ ◆ ◆ **THE JUNE ISSUE WILL**

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 119, No. 1 for May, 1948 Best of New Stories

NOVELETTES

Operation Dynamite.....JAMES NORMAN 10

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The Hand of Danjou.....ROBERT CARSE 62

The Mexican campaign was a tough one even for young Legionnaires, and Waldemar Karig, Third Company, First Battalion, was no longer young. The old fighter had little left but memories, a taste for strong drink and Suzy, his trusty mule. Yet after the massacre of his comrades at Camerone it was the grizzled muleteer who escaped to the hills with his captain's wooden hand—that precious symbol of the Legion's honor on which every man had sworn to fight to the death.

SHORT STORIES

Bluewater Bullion.....H. FREDRIC YOUNG 40

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The Great Muzzle Blast.....GUY RICHARDS 82

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Passage Home.....LESLIE GORDON BARNARD 92

Two men, stranded together in as stinking a hole as could be found anywhere between the Java Sea and Torres Strait. But charity begins at home, even when it's 10,000 miles away.

Charley Hoe Handle's Chicken Party.....JIM KJELGAARD 98

Ever since he became warden of Stick County, Horse Jenkins' main ambition had been to slap that slick Injun poacher behind bars. Now it looked like Charley had dropped into his lap so clean he couldn't possibly miss—and all on account of seven prairie chickens. But, of course even seven birds on the wing are hardly worth one in the hand.

THE SERIAL

Ghost-Mine Gold (3rd of 4 parts).....STEVE FRAZEE 110

Buried alive in an abandoned tunnel under Sylvan Mountain, Rigdon Sadar, still seeking the vanished fortune of the Vivandiere Mine, escapes in time to have his hopes buoyed by a strange clue dropped by the old hermit, Sim Tarwater—and to encounter death a second time in the raging torrent which floods the lower levels of the ghost-mine.

THE FACT STORY

Harvest of the Sea.....ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN 102

Turtle soup flavored with Amontillado is an expensive luxury to a cosmopolitan gourmet but to the Kanakas of the ocean islands the giant seagoing saurians furnish the cheapest mainstay of their diet. It's a constant race between native and gourmet, and nothing but trouble for the turtle from the moment he's spawned.

VERSE

Dinner at Valley Forge.....WILLIAM ARTHUR BREYFOGLE 51

"I will believe we are winning this war
When I dine on wild geese—and not before!"

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Lost Trails..... Where old paths cross 142

The Trail Ahead..... News of next month's issue 141

Cover painted for Adventure *by Robert Stanley*

Kenneth S. White, Editor

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THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

TWO ADDITIONS to the ranks of our Writers' Brigade this month. Guy Richards, who introduces us to Muzzle Blast Maguire on page 82, is, according to his own account, "a tall, bald, former Yale football player and Marine major who has been shamelessly exploited and enslaved by his own two feet." He goes on to explain, re his pedal extremities—

Their desire to keep walking when all the rest of me would just as soon call it off has been responsible for almost everything that has happened to me. Even my baldness. The bare, or unlawned, side of my head is sternward. A fine crop of bushy strands abound on both bows, like the bumpers up forward on a tugboat. The reasons are not dissimilar. Up ahead, where all the air and action take place, the roots have been stimulated by the high commotion of rain, wind, smoke and collision with passing objects. Nature—following the tugboat principle—has rushed to give me protection where it's needed, and has left the vacuum in the rear to wither whatever might have tried to grow.

I started serious walking as a member of the hiking club at Culver Military Academy, Culver, Indiana, where I was also a member of the football team, a cadet captain and captain of the crew, bayonet and hockey teams. I kept up walking at Yale, where I was left tackle on the varsity football team for three years, and from where, during the summers, working as a sailor, I walked through the ports and back country of Labrador, Denmark, Latvia, Norway, Sweden and the West Indies.

But the most serious walking of my life started the year I graduated from Yale (1927) and joined an expedition of the American Museum of Natural History in the Solomon Islands and Territory of New Guinea. On this expedition I had to climb a mountain a day, hunting tropical birds, and then find my way back to the expedition schooner before nightfall. This trip was destined to have echoes when the Marine Corps went to the Solomons in 1942 and asked me to come along. However, before that, it should be explained that when I'm not walking, I'm running, and thereby hangs a tale.

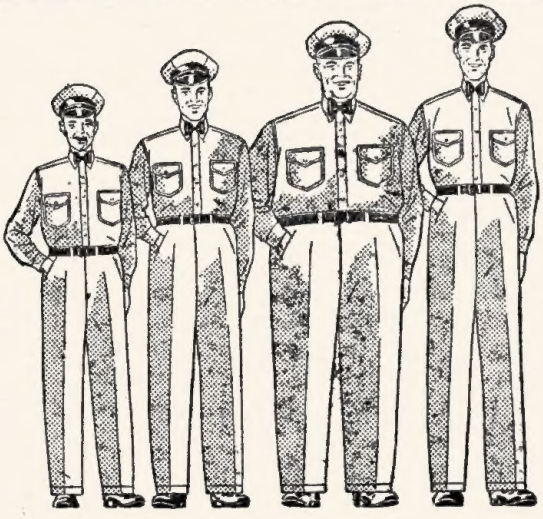
For most of the decade before World War II, I was a reporter and feature writer for the N.Y. *Daily News*. When I came home to my East 58th St. apartment, I always put on old clothes and took a run along the East River. One night, when I was writing on the subject of a missing murderer, Police Commissioner Valentine got it into his head that I couldn't have written what I had if the murderer hadn't been in close touch with me. In short, Valentine believed that the *News* was harboring the murderer. Eight homicide squad detectives were put on my tail, all unbeknownst to me—until, dressed in old clothes, and of course arousing their worst suspicions, I led them out for an unexpected evening's run. Never had those customarily motorized dicks had such a health-building assignment. Unfortunately, they ruined my run and scared me to death.

I served as a patrol officer in the First Marine Division during the past war, continuing to walk, this time as a Marine scout, through the Solomons, New Guinea, New Britain and the Philippines. I'm at present on active duty in Washington, writing a history of the Marine Corps Reserve. But I've had time, in the past two years, to write

(Continued on page 8)

SLIM . . . STOUT . . . SHORT or TALL . . .

Lee Overalls



Lee Matched Shirts & Pants

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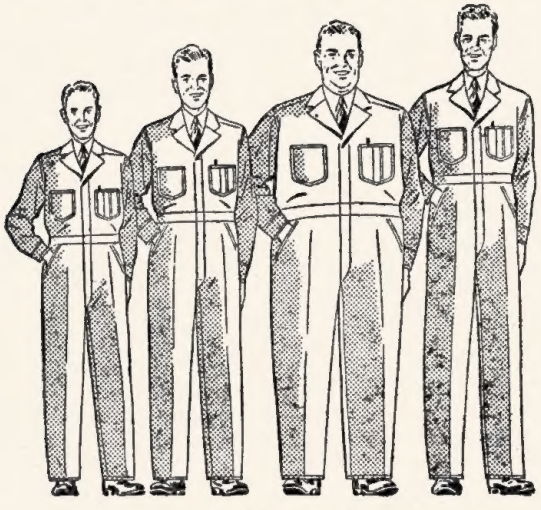
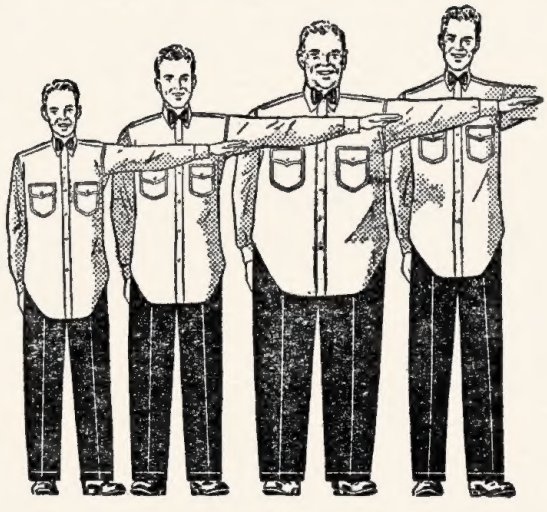


Lee Union-Alls



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(Continued from page 6)

a number of articles and some fiction which have appeared in *Life, Liberty, Marine Corps Gazette, Leatherneck* and *Proceedings* of the U. S. Naval Institute and elsewhere.

LESLIE GORDON BARNARD, whose "Passage Home" appears on page 92, is a Canadian—Past National President of the Canadian Authors' Association—and has published fiction in over a hundred periodicals in various parts of the world. His novel, "Jancis," brought out by Macmillan in 1935, won the Quebec Government Literary Award, and several collections of his short stories have appeared in book form. The most recent, "So Near Is Grandeur," was published in 1946.

ANOTHER addition to our roster of *Ask Adventure* experts this month. Lieut. C. B. Lemon, U.S.C.G., Ret. joins our staff to answer queries on the Coast Guard. He introduces himself thuswise—

Born in a small Pennsylvania hamlet in '97. Moved to West Virginia shortly thereafter and attended schools there. Enlisted in the Navy in May, 1915, and served continuously there until 1927, being in the Navy's gun crews aboard American merchant vessels in the first World War.

Entered the Coast Guard Service in 1927 and served on all types of Coast Guard vessels and patrol boats and at life boat stations ashore.

At the beginning of World War II, attained commissioned rank and served on convoy vessels. Was executive officer aboard the C. G. cutter *Mojave* for a time in North Atlantic waters, Greenland and Newfoundland. Finished up as assistant training officer of recruits at C. G. Training Stations, Curtis Bay, Md., and Mayport, Florida, and from there retired after thirty years' service (Navy and Coast Guard). Am now living on my "estate" in a small Pennsylvania village—the Delaware River is the north boundary of my snug harbor—in the middle of a real deer hunters' paradise. Deer use our village streets quite often—out of hunting season that is!

I'm delighted to join the *Ask Adventure* staff and will do my best to answer any questions on the Coast Guard regarding enlistments, commissions, duty, types of vessels, classes of motor boats, motor boat laws, C. G. Life Saving Stations and equipment and so on.

WE THOUGHT you'd be interested, as we were, in the following anecdotal material about Riley Grannan, he of our famous "Last Adventure," and Herman W. Knickerbocker who delivered the eulogy at the gambler's coffin-side as recounted in Sam Dunham's pamphlet with which so many of you are familiar.

Jack Hines, who has written for us on occasion a tale of the early Alaskan mining camps, knew Grannan and Knickerbocker later in Rawhide.

Mr. Hines writes us—

I have just finished rereading "Riley Grannan's Last Adventure," and it recalled many things to me. The facts of Riley Grannan's death and funeral service stand out vividly in my mind even today and Sam Dunham's on-the-spot record brings them even more clearly to mind.

Knickerbocker and I had become pretty close friends in Rawhide for the simple reason perhaps that we were what you might term kindred spirits. He knew of an ordeal I had endured—the enactment, long imprisonment awaiting trial and final acquittal in Goldfield on a first degree murder charge. He had never spoken of it; neither had I but I knew he was trying always to soothe and comfort me. The reaction had nearly gotten me down.

Work seemed to be the answer. I took a lease on the Morning Star Fraction and set up machinery and housings to get the mine in production. I would see Knick nearly every night after knocking off when I would go to George Moss' Montezuma. But Knick would have been hanging around the saloon nearly all day. His face would light up when he saw me pull up in front of George's place and he would come out, climb up on the buckboard and we'd go shopping for the makings of supper. Sometimes we'd pick up Harry Hedrick to wind out a congenial threesome—and return to the mine where I'd cook up the supper. After there would be songs and quotes from Shakespeare and Scriptures, and, of course, always a convivial bottle.

Knick bore a remarkable resemblance to John Barrymore with an added attribute that John lacked; a beautiful speaking voice. Hamlet was Knick's favorite Shakespearean play, and in the scenes where the Dane and the ghost of the murdered king, his father, had converse, Knick would truly hold Harry and me spellbound. I claim that the night Riley Grannan died and Harry Hedrick, Knick and I took over the task of arranging the funeral services was the beginning of Knick's rehabilitation. Standing next to the coffin with Mrs. Hedrick at the piano, I sang "Face to Face," and Knick thereafter began his immortal eulogy.

There is nothing definite that I can say as to what eventually happened to Knick, although I did hear many years ago that he had gone back to Los Angeles and become

(Continued on page 135)

WHERE A MAN IS STILL IMPORTANT!

MACHINES are important. Inventions are important. But it's *men* who win wars and guard the peace.

No one knows that any better than the U. S. Army. That's why you'll find real men in the U. S. Infantry, Artillery, and Armored Cavalry.

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CAREERS WITH A FUTURE

U. S. Army and U. S. Air Force

By

JAMES NORMAN

OPERATION DYNAMITE

ILLUSTRATED BY
EARL EUGENE MAYAN

THE HIGH taut voice of the wind in the Cantabrian mountain gap and the unbroken solitude dulled his alertness. Davie Coster did not see the Civil Guard patrol. He did not hear the careful approach of the four men until it was too late.

Since late morning he had rested here in the Pass, studying the face of this corner of Northern Spain as it spread upturned to the sky. Behind him and to the south was the downward sweep of the wide solitary Leon plateau and the yellow tormented plains of Castile. In three days' time he had worked his way across that parched land, avoiding its dangers, aware of its treachery and the men who searched for him there.

Having reached the lonely heights of Pajares Pass, he felt that his mission was half accomplished. He could relax for a moment. Directly ahead was the region of the Asturias. The second part of his job would begin in that region of fog and billowing mists which rose in deep

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breaths from a thousand secret valleys. As he sat in the lee of a boulder, hearing nothing of danger behind him, his eyes surveyed the spread of mountains.

It was a new province for him, one of the few corners of Spain he had never visited. Still, his glance explored its depths—not with the flat casual wonder of a tourist, but with the precision of a military man. He measured distances in his mind; distances to be spent with caution and understanding in the coming hours. His gaze instinctively marked off valleys and ravines which men could defend or from which men might attack. It was his way of looking at Spain—a habit which had made him an effective Resistance leader within a country not of his birth.

It was an existence which had begun for him when he had fought from Brunete to the Ebro during the civil war. After the defeat of the Spanish Republic he had returned to England only to find a bigger war thrust upon him and all men. His stay there had been brief. He had helped train Commando units and had then been sent back into Spain to work with the guerrillas who waged an endless, terrible warfare against Franco's Falange and the Nazi groups overrunning the Peninsula. Following Germany's defeat, he no longer wanted to go home. He had lost the taste for the prim, calm daily routine of peacetime living.

There was more of the Spaniard in him now than of the Englishman. He should have been born a Spaniard. His physical features and his mind were of the Peninsula. He had the stripped-down leanness of an Aragonese mountaineer; he had the rare ability to think in Spanish and to involve himself in the volatile life of the country. Even Ortiz considered him a Spaniard.

He smiled reflectively, remembering Ortiz. For a second his thoughts went back to the Toledo Hills where he worked with a guerrilla band known in the region as "the silent men."

LESS than a week ago Ortiz had come to the hills to bring the guerrillas news and orders. Ortiz was a round little man with the look of a Valencian silk merchant. He was, in fact, a merchant. But between the threads he served as a liaison agent for the Junta Suprema, the secret national committee of all republican groups which had sprouted within the country to combat the dictatorship.

"Listen, *hombre,*" Ortiz had asked. "Can you carry a map in your mind?" He had a way of explaining things with stark clarity, and yet obliquely.

Davie recalled how his expectations had quickened. Usually when Ortiz appeared it meant a job in the Madrid region: burning a plane at the airport, destroying a convoy of supplies or a raid on Civil Guard outposts. But when Ortiz mentioned a map it meant sending a man out alone into another region.

"The *turistas* move again," Ortiz explained. He had no need to translate the term. In wartime it had meant German technicians who had been as thickly imbedded in the pelt of the country as lice on a dog. Today it stood for those same technicians and countless other Nazi refugees who had escaped the wrath of the Allies in Germany. Thousands of them were still hidden in isolated villas and haciendas, fanatically waiting their turn again.

But why they should be on the move had puzzled Davie.

"They make for South America," Ortiz had replied.

"A good riddance."

"Puede ser—" Ortiz shrugged. "But your argument is too Spanish. The Junta does not agree with it, perhaps because of the kind who are going. Among them is a Doctor Hallert."

The name made no impression. "Hallert?"

Ortiz brushed the name aside with his hand. "And others," he said. "Maybe you do not know this, or maybe you do. The Germans during their war moved many important experimental laboratories into Spain — some in Andalusia, another near Leon—places which were out of reach of British and American bombers since Spain was neutral. These men have gone on working here even after there is no more Nazi Germany. They work as if the war were still on and they might yet win.

"But Spain has neither the wealth nor industry to further their experiments

fully. A deal has been made and these men are being sent to South America to develop a large project. Doctor Hallert is the key. He is a physicist, a specialist on fissionable material. Undoubtedly he and his men will devise an atom bomb. Our Junta has gotten this information and much more. These men are not to reach South America."

"Kidnapping?" Davie asked.

Ortiz shook his head. "It would be best to capture them and turn them over to the Americans or Russians for trial. However, this is not possible. They must die here." A trace of a smile crossed his mouth. "One group has already died. Our Sierra Nevada guerrillas raided their villa two days ago."

"And the rest?"

"They'll be on a train. The Asturias."

Davie had looked at the man, surprised.

"It is the sort of job you do well," Ortiz went on. "You'll find the train route very interesting. It starts at La Robla, above Leon, goes through the Pass on the Oviedo route. Instead of going directly to Oviedo it switches at Lena to a smaller line which ends at the little port of San Esteban."

"The train is to be wrecked?"

"Nay, *hombre*. No ordinary sabotage. These men and the equipment they have with them are of most importance. You must destroy the train, but completely. No one must escape. The Junta is liberal. It will let you choose the method and the place. You have six days. You must travel alone and take nothing. In the Asturias you will contact our *guerrilleros* for manpower and supplies."

Ortiz smiled thoughtfully, saying, "You'll find the Asturias very interesting. There they have a proverb which goes —*In the Asturias women are lonely because their men have married dynamite.* You'll need men who are married to explosives."

THE PROVERB lingered in his mind now as he rested in the notch of the Pass. It fitted into his plans. It was part of each step that would carry him through the next few days. He counted those steps: first, contact with a certain shoemaker in the village of Lena which was but a half day's distance now; then, a meeting with a man called Ferrer who was chief of all the Asturian resistance movement. An elongated shadow fell across the mountain path. A quick involuntary chill stabbed through him for he knew that his thoughts had gone too far ahead. He had been careless. Even as he reached his feet he sensed that he had been trapped and the trap had been well sprung and there would be no escape.

Sunlight reflected from the black patent-leather hat of the *Guardia Civil* who appeared from behind a jagged outcrop of rock. The man's rifle was thrust forward. A second and a third *guardia* appeared in the path ahead. A fourth man climbed from a narrow ravine. He carried a pistol in his hand and he strode forth, shouting, *"Los manos—arriba!"*

Coster held both hands in full sight. He raised them quickly.

Three of the guards waited at a distance. They were solidly built men, individually hardened by the hatred an entire nation held against them. Their noisy, shouting sergeant was younger. His face had not yet taken on the armor of the others. He halted when a pace from Coster and raised his pistol.

"You are Coster, the Englishman," he stated in a Spanish that contained all the stony harshness of the Galician dialect.

Davie shifted his position, moving his body slightly. The guns of the *guardias* moved in concert. A swift, wry tightening pinched the corners of his mouth, the only sign of tension within him. He stared at the men, not showing his dismay, yet wondering desperately if his identity had been discovered at Leon or in one of the smaller villages he had touched. "I am Garcia Orgiva," he replied with Aragonese stubbornness.

"You are Coster, the *Inglés*." It was both statement and query in one.

Davie shook his head and stared back with the blunt puzzled expression of a peasant.

"What's your region?" demanded the sergeant.

"Zaragoza."

The sergeant smiled confidently as though proud he had set a clever trap. Still holding his gun up, he said, "That is a long walk."

Davie shrugged. "I come to work in the mines by Oviedo."

"You are no miner."

"Nay. In Aragon we farm. But this season the earth is dry and hard as stone, as it was last season. What is the difference if we mine rock for potatoes or rock for coal?"

The sergeant frowned dubiously. His glance searched Davie's face and clothes. Such a face one saw by the thousands in Spain. And the clothes: the dusty black corduroy jacket, the gray-striped collarless shirt, the tightly fitting beret, these were the uniform of a man of the soil. What disturbed him was that they were not worn as a foreigner would wear them. He signaled one of his men.

"Frico. Search this one."

The guard slung his rifle and came forward. He smelled of polish and of leather. His hands went over Davie's clothes expertly. He handed the sergeant Coster's papers; a *salvo conducto,* the identity card and the ration card for Garcia Orgiva.

"No gun?" the sergeant asked.

The searcher shook his head.

"You are sure?" The sergeant frowned as though this, too, disturbed him. His glance went from the identity card to Coster's face, then back to the card. An uncertainty filled his eyes.

"Perhaps this one isn't the *Inglés,*" suggested the guard.

"It may be so, but who knows," shrugged the sergeant. "We'll call the Central in Leon. Señor Gazlo will know."

Davie remained silent. He no longer needed to think back upon how the thread of his trail had been picked up. The name Gazlo was answer enough. To those who lived silently in Spain, the *guerrilleros* and underground fighters, the name of Gazlo inspired alertness and terror. Gazlo was a police agent whose perverse brilliance was beyond that of the most efficient Security Police. His specialty was the republican movement.

The mention of Gazlo seemed also to disturb the terrain. For an instant, Davie's attention left the Civil Guards and was attracted to an odd configuration on the mountain slope some distance above the path. At first, it had not moved. He thought it was a small rock resting upon a boulder. Now, in a flashing second of hope, he was certain it had been a man's head he had seen. It was gone now.

"Vayamous—" the sergant ordered his men. "Frico, you ahead, the others behind. To the road station."

Davie looked back. The flame of hope and expectation which had run through him for a moment vanished now. There was no sign from the hillside.

The road station was located farther down in the notch of the Pass where the railway and highway ran parallel. It was a single-room stone hut with wooden bunks to bed down the guards who patrolled this segment of mountain road. Seeing the number of guards stationed here, Davie lost all hope of escape. He would, in fact, be fortunate if he again left the hut unscarred, for the sergeant who had brought him in, and the corporal on duty, had begun to argue.

"It is simple," said the corporal. "For an *hombre perverso,* you give him a *flagelación.* He'll tell you that he is this Coster, whether he is or not. You see, it is best to do things in the customary way."

"It is not the modern method."

"It works. A *flagelación* with pistol butts. I have never seen it to fail."

The sergeant was more cautious. "Nay, I'll call Leon," he said.

CHAPTER II

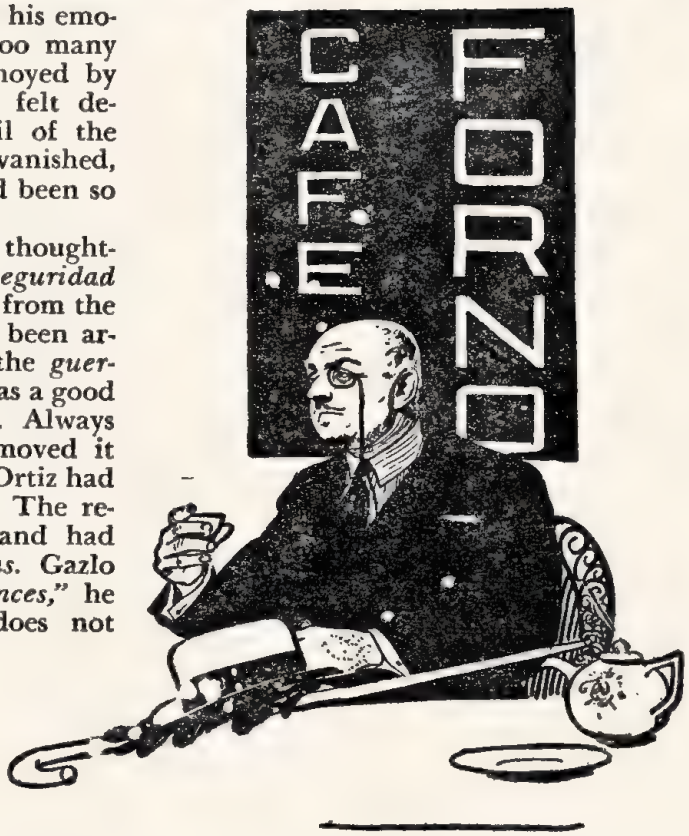
PASSPORT TO DEATH

SENOR GAZLO was a short, round man. He had wide brown eyes like doughnuts with small holes. As he sat in the Café Forno opposite Leon's tawny *Seguridad* building, he gently sipped his morning coffee infused with *Domecq* and stared about at the few patrons in the café in a desperate effort to look amiable. The effort failed and at length he resigned himself to a sheepish expression, as though he realized that something within himself always came forth to warn and frighten people.

When people were instinctively cold toward him he did not normally resent it. He prided himself on the thickness

of his skin and the bluntness of his emotions. And he had achieved too many successes to let himself be annoyed by people. But this morning he felt depressed. He had lost the trail of the *Inglés* in Leon. It had totally vanished, even though the beginnings had been so good.

He sat back, stirring his coffee thoughtfully. The information the *Seguridad* in Madrid had literally scraped from the skin of a Señor Ortiz who had been arrested had warned them that the *guerrillero Inglés,* for whom there was a good reward, was moving northward. Always before, when the *Inglés* had moved it meant trouble. Unhappily, this Ortiz had died before telling everything. The republican had been obdurate and had had no heart for the *flagelacións.* Gazlo sighed contemplatively. *"Entonces,"* he thought. "One like Coster does not



Señor Gazlo sipped his coffee and stared about the café in a desperate effort to look amiable.

evade me forever. The foreigner must sooner or later reveal his ignorance and will commit an un-Spanish error. Thus I shall trap him."

A man entered the café and came directly to his table. "Telephone from the mountains," the messenger announced as he stared oddly at Gazlo's crumpled black business suit and his fantastic shirt. It was pale lavender.

Gazlo followed the man into the Security building and up a flight of stairs. He puffed slightly as he picked up the phone. The magic word, *Coster,* came over the wire.

"Make a description?" he demanded quickly.

The description came in and he repeated it as though he, too, had a similar description framed in his memory. "Tall . . . weight 70 kilos . . . eyes brown . . . sharp nose . . . face, *muy flamenco* . . . scar, left cheek . . . carried identity papers for one Orgiva . . ."

"Orgiva?" he repeated louder. "Then he is undoubtedly the one." He shouted now as if projecting his voice and authority physically to the mountain patrol station. *"Oiga*—you will provide sufficient guard and bring him down immediately. You have a vehicle? Good. Sufficient guard, remember."

Señor Gazlo grimaced happily at the clerk watching him. The clerk attempted to repeat the smile but it froze, half formed upon his lips. He was uncomfortably aware that Gazlo's teeth were false and they were set in bright cherry-red gums.

TWO *guardias* strode from the stone hut and stood in the harsh white daylight, each a little apart from the vehicle which had pulled up near the doorway. Their rifles were cocked and expectant. A moment later, Davie Coster was shoved into the daylight after them. His hands were bound behind him. The peacock-proud sergeant motioned a guard to help him mount the camion. The camion, designed for transporting assault troops and police, had four rows of hard wooden benches fastened upon

its bed. Davie was placed on a center bench; a guard sat on the front bench facing him, two others occupied the bench behind and the sergeant rode ahead in the enclosed cab.

The truck lunged forward with a jerk. It headed into the biting wind teething through the mountain gap. For a mile or more it seemed to shoot directly toward the limitless horizon as if to take off in flight, then it began to dip toward the land below, pursuing a road that twisted and wound tortuously downward into the plains of Leon.

Davie's eyes ran past the man facing him and watched the tortile road and the boulder-strewn slopes flashing past. With restless perception he weighed and gauged each change in the rugged terrain, seeking out the thing that might never offer itself—the instant and place to make a break. The camion's tires growled upon the gravel road, a demented screaming overlaid with dust.

"They're taking no chances of my jumping," he thought as he tried to estimate their speed. He tried to relax yet his eyes and nerves could take no rest. Even the mountains rejected it. There was scarcely a single bit of placid earth. To the fullest extent of the eye the land kept its air of tragic and unweary drama.

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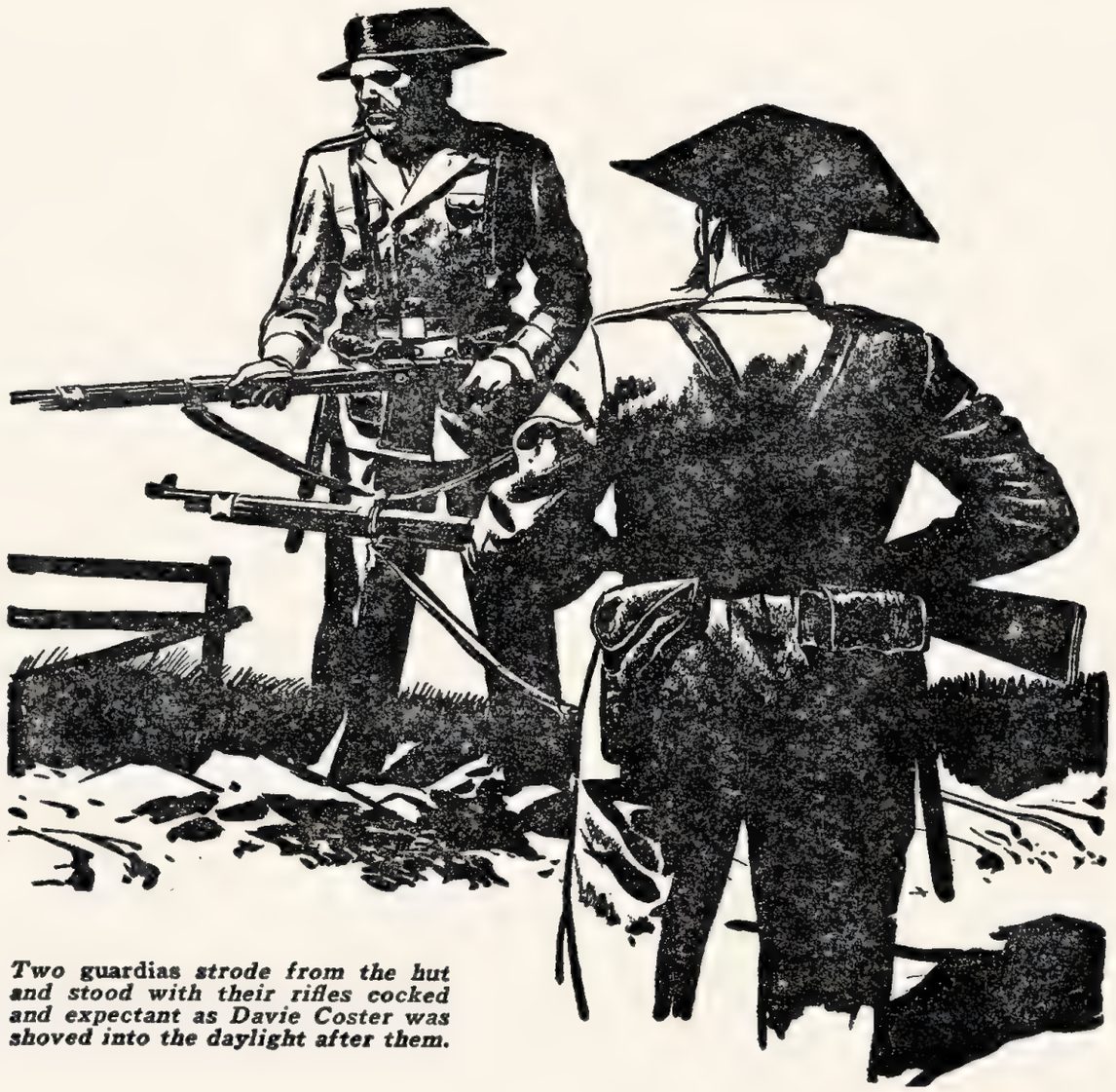
Naked and convulsive, it was as if its muscles had contracted in some past age to heave the earth up in giant mounds which the elements had cruelly furrowed. From time to time this almost architectural war which the exasperated earth waged against an unknown enemy rose in frenzied climax, became jagged pinnacles thrusting up in protest against the heavens.

He tried to imagine himself already in Leon. He visualized the streets and squares. Perhaps his chance would come as they slowed in the narrow, crooked old section of town. Then he shook his head soberly. There was no use deluding himself. Long ago he had turned in his passport to safety.

When he had come back into Spain during the blitz war his superiors had warned him that if he were caught they could do nothing for him, even though Madrid and London were then preserving an uneasy neutrality. He had been on his own. His name had been erased from the books of England. He had become one of the blank pages in the history of the war. And at war's end, when he had decided to stay in Spain, he had in effect erased London from his own book. He liked to think that he had enlisted himself as a citizen of Spain—



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not the present hunger- and terror-grained country, but of a future Spain, a distant Republic visible only in the minds of passionate and unbendable men.

His lips creased at the bitter irony of the thought. He'd miss how it was going to be. He had let himself get involved in the foundations of that Republic, trapped in it, and he'd never see the placid world his dreams had projected.

The camion slowed for a hairpin turn. His body slid forward against the braking of headlong speed. Suddenly there was a shout of warning. He pitched forward, sprawling upon the truck floor between the benches. When he finally managed to sit up he realized the truck had stopped.

The sergeant was standing on the running board, pistol in hand. He was staring at something ahead. The other guards scanned the rocky slopes nervously.

"Land mines?" he heard the guard ahead question the sergeant.

Twenty feet beyond the truck a slight mound protruded above the skin of the road. It was like an eye, thickly lidded and shut. The sergeant went ahead to investigate. He moved with the caution of a well-trained man searching for tripwires. When within a yard of the mound he paused and lowered himself to one knee.

A shot rang out. Its sound echoed in the gorge, becoming a dozen shots. The sergeant seemed to lift himself slightly and with odd stiffness as though his movement were a phrase of an unfamiliar dance. Then he crumpled upon the roadway and lay still.

"Manos—"

The order came from the slope above and behind the camion. The guns of the *guardias* instantly clattered to the truckbed and road.

A FIGURE stepped out from behind a rock outcrop. He had the candid look and easy movements of a boy. He carried a short carbine, not in the Spanish manner, but loosely. In Davie's mind flashed a curious remembrance: illustrations he had seen of American westerners who held their rifles thus.

"Mira," the boy said, jerking his head toward the heights above him.

All eyes shifted toward the slope and all seemed, in the same instant, to find the coned muzzle of a light machine gun protruding from behind a large rock.

"Entonces," the boy added, as though enjoying a curious humor in the situation. He nodded to the far side of the road.

Another armed man had materialized there. He carried a holstered pistol and he had the ways of a peasant, the gaunt hard look, the weathered silence of the old. His gnarled hands played idly with a small bundle of thick black sticks tied together with wire. There was no need to explain the bundle nor the lit cigar in his teeth. Davie recognized it and the *guardias* paled before it—dynamite.

The older man now collected the guns which had fallen to the ground. He made the *guardias* throw down their oblong, black leather cartridge boxes. When he had completed his work he called up to the hillside to whoever was hidden behind the machine gun.

Meanwhile the boy with the black dancing eyes came down toward the camion and stood to one side. "You American?" he called to Davie in English.

Davie stared uncomprehendingly at him. Even though these men might release him, this was neither the time nor place to reveal his identity. The boy repeated the query in Spanish.

"Garcia Orgiva," Davie gave his name.

"They have taken you, why?"

Davie shrugged helplessly. "By the Virgin, I do not know. They say I am *Inglés*. I have seen an *Inglés* but once. It was at the fair of San Fermin many years ago."

He was told to drop from the truck and his hands were untied. Then the boy ordered the Civil Guards to mount and drive on. But at once there was a hesitancy among them as their eyes turned fearfully toward the mound on the road and the body of the sergeant.

"The mine," one of them pleaded.

The boy ran ahead and dragged the sergeant's body aside. He relieved it of its pistol. Then he went to the mound and kicked at it, uncovering a metal container, a cooking platter. Davie smiled

suddenly. The sight brought back memories of the old days, of the ill-equipped republican *milicianos* who had devised this same trick to stop Franco's Italian tanks. Fear of mines was always enough to bring a tank to a halt, perhaps to unbutton it or to turn it back. He knew he was among friends.

The camion moved on, raising its cloud of dust. On the road, Davie turned to the boy. "You shouldn't have let them go," he said. "It doesn't pay to let the *guardia* see a man's face and let them live."

"You are the *Inglés,* then?" said the boy. He did not take his eyes off the truck.

A shot rang out. The sergeant seemed to lift himself slightly and with an odd stiffness as though his movement were a phrase of an unfamiliar dance. Then he crumpled.

Davie didn't answer. "You?" he asked instead.

"I am Guernika."

Davie glanced up the hill toward the machine gun. No one had moved there. "Who's backing you on the slope there?"

"No one. Just the old man's gun wedged between the rocks."

The boy still had not taken his gaze from the road ahead.

"You back up in the Pass when they trapped me?" Davie asked.

"Si, hombre."

A distance below, where the funnel of dust raised by the camion swelled in the road like a tawny caterpillar, there was a sudden orange flash. The truck seemed to leap upward then abruptly disintegrated. The delayed sound of the explosion carried to the three men watching.

"Check—" the boy said in his curiously accented English. His glance flicked toward the old man, then to Davie. He said, "His name is Explosivo. It is what we call him. Explosivo is always careless with dynamite. He must have left the sticks on the camion."

The old man smiled back at both of them shyly.

AFTER the camion blew up they made off quickly, carrying the light *máquina* which had been placed on the slope as a decoy and the guns of the Civil Guards. They went for a while without talk, climbing steadily to get away from the road. Then they began going down. There was no trail that Davie could sense or see, yet in following the old man and the boy he had the impression that they knew their way and were following an invisible path which was there for them, handed down to them through a chain of ancestors.

Slowly, they came down from the barren heights into the pine country. The old man, Explosivo, finally halted. "We rest now, eh?" he said.

Davie welcomed the break. It was cool here. A thin edge of breeze gathered from the upper slopes came down and sang in the pines. The smells were rich and woody. He dropped to the ground beside the two and stared at them curiously.

"How far to Lena?" he asked them.

"Not far," Explosivo replied. He, too, studied Davie. He was lean and patient and not too given to words.

"Where do you go?" Davie asked.

"A little west. Our village."

"Tres Piños," the boy added.

The old one frowned at him. Then Davie asked the lad, "Guerrilla group?"

"You can call it that."

"Any former republican army men with you?"

"Might be." The boy seemed anxious to avoid queries but was quick to put them himself. "You are sure you are not of America?" Guernika asked.

Davie smiled. "Of America, no. Of England, perhaps."

"I am very American," Guernika said. "I have not been there but I had a grandfather many times ago who went to America. Some day I shall go there to visit our family."

"North America?"

The boy waved his hand vaguely. "To America. There was only one America when this grandfather went. His name was Cortes."

Davie had a feeling that the boy, with his air of unbounded enthusiasm, was diverting his attention from something he needed to probe. He turned to the older man, asking, "What kind of *guerrilleros* are you?"

The old one spread his gnarled hands. "It depends on what kind of man you are."

"Republicano."

"There are many types. In Lena you will find very many kinds."

"If I were looking for a shoemaker there who repairs the shoes of one called Ferrer?"

"Francisco?"

"The same."

Davie smiled now and Explosivo smiled in return. A contact had been made with guerrillas who worked with the *Junta Suprema*. It had been made not as he had expected, but it had come.

Explosivo rose, saying, "I think it is best we all go to Tres Piños."

They descended the wall of a valley and soon came within view of a settlement of stone huts that appeared to be nailed to the mountain side and hanging half between heaven and earth. The village's single gaunt street was deserted

except for a grunting sow and its brood which had taken refuge in the mud near a well. Explosivo and the boy stopped by the well.

"You will go to the fourth house there and say I sent you," explained the old one. "We'll turn in the guns and see you afterward."

Davie pushed back the burlap curtain which served as the door to the house and stepped into the abrupt shadow of the room within. His glance made a turn of the room, taking in the dim illumination from a single net-covered window, the swept earth floor and the stubby-legged Spanish chairs arrayed along one wall. Two women stood by an earthen stove. One was middle-aged. She looked solid and Asturian. The other, a much younger girl, suddenly drew in her breath as she turned to look at him.

"Inglés—" she said. It was a quick cry of surprised pleasure and recognition.

She came toward him quickly and her eyes searched his face, looking deeply and wonderingly at it. Something she apparently saw in him seemed to satisfy her. Her fingers touched his arm and his shoulder tenderly. "You've come back, *Inglés*. I knew you'd come back." Tears had come into her dark wide eyes.

Davie's mouth sagged in surprise. He felt that he must look ridiculous. His glance went toward the old woman and he saw her watching without emotion. His gaze returned to the girl and he frowned for he had no memory of her. He had never seen her before.

"I'm sorry—" he began uncertainly.

The girl smiled. "You fought in Madrid during the civil war."

"Yes, but—"

"You were there. It's in your eyes." She turned to the older woman. "You see, María. He has it in his eyes as I told you he would."

He glanced around the room again confused. "Explosivo said I would find Ferrer here?"

The older woman pointed to the girl. "She is Ferrer."

"The Ferrer I look for is a man," he replied. As he said it, he realized at once that he could be wrong. In his own mind he had supposed Ferrer would be a man. He knew that when Ortiz had given him the name, *Francisco Ferrer,* it was but a code name, for it had once belonged to a Barcelona revolutionary who had died decades ago. But being a man's name, he had expected it to cover a man.

"There are many Ferrers," the girl answered, "and there are many Franciscos." She gave him a pleasant laugh, as though amused by his confusion, then went on: "I am but one of them. How is it you know Francisco?"

He explained, cautiously telling of his instructions from the Junta in Madrid.

"The shoemaker, Vicente?" she interrupted.

"The name is Vicente. I was to have given him a sign."

"What?"

"My identity paper."

"You have it?"

"No, it was taken by the *guardias* when they arrested me this noon. It was from these the old one, Explosivo, rescued me."

SHE stared at him silently for a moment. In her eyes there was a veiled caution which had not been there before. At length she nodded gravely, murmuring, "Perhaps the loss of the identity is not important."

"Would Vicente have brought me to you?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Nay, he might have brought you to any of a number of Ferrers. To protect ourselves and to protect our *jefe* and to protect those who wish to contact him, there are in certain villages a few men who are also called Ferrer. These alone know where to find *el jefe* and our headquarters. But without the identity Vicente or the others would not bring you to us."

He nodded, understandingly. He could not keep his eyes from her. The shape of her face, framed by dark hair, possessed a serene kind of motionlessness that fascinated him. It was a face able to withstand his gaze without being troubled. It was totally unlike the faces of Englishwomen he had known, faces that were tormented with perpetual meaningless movements, the expressions suggesting obscure psychological distress.

"Will you take me to *el jefe?*" he asked.

She nodded in agreement. "I will take you tonight."

"Now. It is important."

"Tonight," she answered stubbornly. "One is never taken to him except at dark."

He shrugged, holding down his impatience, understanding the caution which was so important to these people. Caution for them was more important than haste because it measured the distance between life and death. He walked to the window and looked for the sun. It had begun to drop in the west.

"And your name, *chica?*" he inquired, turning toward the girl again.

"Ferrer."

"No other?"

"Ferrer is enough."

"Do the others, the old one and the Basque boy who brought me here, come with us tonight?"

The girl shook her head. "Nay. The old one, perhaps, but not the boy. The fewer who come to headquarters, the better."

He frowned slightly. "You distrust them, yet you trust me?"

"We trust them," she replied. "Guernika we trust because he is now a *guerrillero* for reasons deeper than politics. His mother and father were killed by the German aviators who destroyed the village of Guernika in the first year of the civil war. And the old man—he's my father."

She smiled. "And I trust you. I have known you since Madrid."

His nerves grew taut and disturbed as he looked at her. On the fringe of his thoughts was the gnawing suspicion that he was being drawn into something beyond his control, something that was yet vague and unsubstantial, something whirling in another dimension.

"Where in Madrid?" he asked.

"During the war."

"I can't place you."

An undismayed smile played upon her lips. Then, as though it were expected of her and she had done it time and time before, she stood on her toes and kissed him on the mouth—a quick, warm kiss that left him with the startled impression that her lips were both moist and dry at the same time.

"When you think of me other than as Ferrer," she said, "you will call me Cristina."

Before he had recovered from his confusion she was at the doorway and had turned, smiling at him happily. "I'll call the others," she said. "We shall eat, then after dark, we shall go to Ferrer."

Davie shook his head as though the mere motion might clear away the tumultuous thoughts crowding his brain. He tried to place her in his memory and could not. Instead, he could not help but feel that there was an implication somewhere of something hidden behind her curious forwardness. He turned exasperatedly to the old woman who was preparing food.

"Is she all right?" he asked.

"You think she is mad?" Maria stared at him solemnly.

"Is she?"

"Nay, *hombre.* It is only that happiness has taken her. And entirely because you have returned."

"How did she know I was *Inglés?*"

The older woman shrugged with a wise patience. "For years she has spoken only of you, *Inglés.* Ever since she came here from Madrid to be with her father, she has waited. Even Manuel Marin who would do all things for her has had to wait, too."

"Her *novio?*"

"*Sí.* He is of the railroad."

Davie's interest quickened. "Of the railroad? What does he do? Is he republican?"

Maria grunted scornfully. "He is an engineer. And he is republican, but *muy flojo.*" She tilted her flat palm to indicate something unsteady.

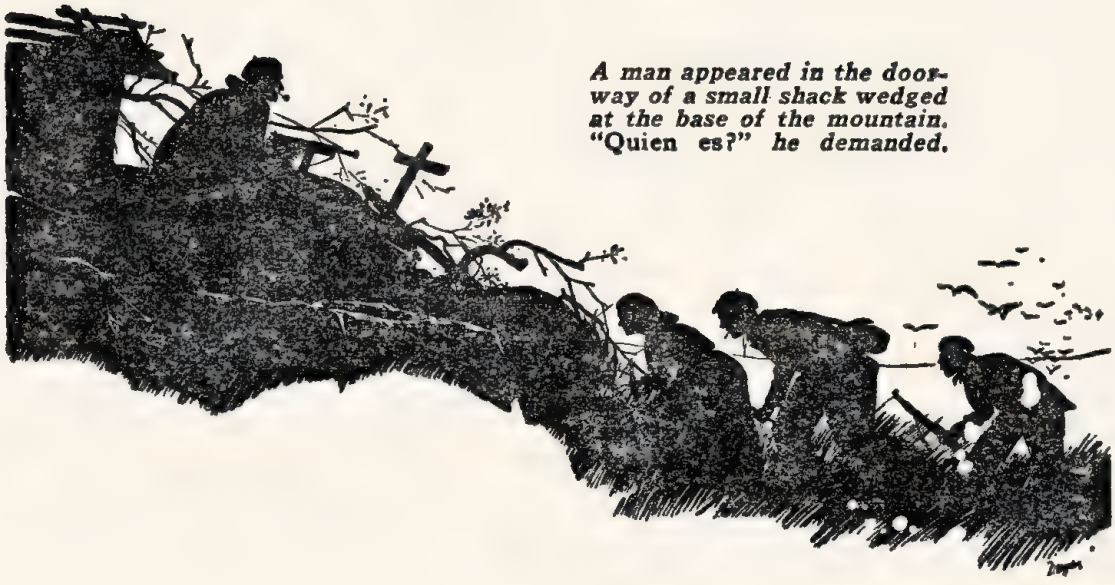
"What road does he work?"

The woman stared at him suddenly, then compressed her dry hard mouth, as though she realized she had said too much and would say no more.

CHAPTER III

VULTURES WITH SWASTIKAS

THAT evening they left Tres Piños afoot—Davie and Explosivo and Cristina. They followed a twisting mule trail that stabbed into the whispering mountains and, after a distance, seemed to



A man appeared in the doorway of a small shack wedged at the base of the mountain. "Quien es?" he demanded.

vanish. For an hour the invisible route carried them downward through the ravines and forests of the Asturias, always into places of hidden valleys and sudden canyons. It was a land for guerrillas, a land of drifting mists and luminous shadows upon which an eternal spirit of freedom could be nourished and kept alive. Here in these mountains the medieval Christians had banded together to drive out the Moorish invader; here the first effective resistance to Napoleon's legions had been born. And now, again, the descendants of those early *guerrilleros* held these mountains against a modern tyranny.

Twice they encountered guerrilla sentries who challenged them from the darkness. Each time there were a few words with the men, a little something to hold them during their long intervals of watchful loneliness.

They came to a narrow-gauge railway bed which needled through a canyon. The tracks had been ripped up and only scattered ties lay imbedded in the loose gravel. The girl was in the lead and her stamina impressed Davie. She seldom seemed to need rest and she never let him pause. It was as if the circuitous route she followed had been intended to confuse him. Even silence had become part of the camouflage as though she and the old man feared that he might hold some word or phrase of theirs as a landmark with which to guide himself through this area if he were ever to return.

At last the trackbed broadened. They came to a leveled area scattered with refuse, abandoned mining equipment and tumbled sheds that lay without life at the base of the canyon wall. The sound of their passage across the loosely crushed rock brought forth another apparition—a man who appeared in the doorway of a small shack wedged at the base of the mountain. He carried a light machine gun.

"*Quien es?*" he demanded.

"Cristina."

"Come forward." Abruptly the gun went up toward Davie menacingly. "And this one?"

"For *el jefe*."

As they entered the shack Davie took in the entire darkened room at a glance and experienced a sudden sense of doubt. The place was empty and stale smelling. It had felt no fire nor habitation for ages. He turned suspiciously toward the girl. She had sensed his alarm and had taken his hand.

"This is the suburb of our city," she said.

Ahead of them, Explosivo had pushed aside the boards making the shack wall on the mountain side. Beyond lay a wide tunnel and at its far end a dim electric bulb glowed. "We have many caves beyond," Cristina was saying. "We have printing presses, a generator, even a

school. This mine was abandoned before the war."

They went through two connected caverns; one a storeroom, another where a few men were repairing firearms, then into a large light room. For an instant, Davie was stunned as he stared about him for here, buried in the mountains of the Asturias was a room that took him back over the years to Republican Madrid, to the offices of the Popular Front parties. Upon the walls and tacked to the tunnel timbers were huge colored propaganda posters from the war years. His glance rested familiarly upon the battered wooden field desks, a duplicating machine and a rack of carbines.

There were a number of men in the room. One man stood with his legs planted apart on each side of a small glowing electric hotplate. He carefully warmed his flanks and bottom. A few of the men rose, eyeing Davie sharply and calling greetings to Cristina and Explosivo. In each one, Davie sensed and saw the mark of the *guerrillero*—the restrained voices, the alertness and the wiriness.

"Which is Ferrer?" he asked Cristina.

She pointed to the man who straddled the hotplate. Davie went to him and offered his hand. *"Salud,"* he said. "I am Coster. The Junta has sent me."

"He was with the *Brigadas Internacionales* in the war," Cristina added.

THE man Ferrer nodded briefly, without show of friendship or animosity. A scar over his left eye turned his expression into an unintentional wink. "Did he come armed?" Ferrer asked Explosivo.

"I carry no gun," Davie replied.

"Papers?"

Davie began to explain the affair with the Civil Guards but he was cut short by Ferrer. "It has already been reported," the man said. Then the latter studied him with his ironically winking stare as though not quite believing that a man could look so native, could speak as a man of the soil, yet claim to have been an Englishman and of the Brigades.

Ferrer moved away from the hotplate, rubbing his trousers with an air of thoughtful satisfaction. "So you were with the *Brigadas* in the war," he said. "In Madrid at any time?"

"Frequently."

Ferrer nodded his head toward one of the men who had gathered round them. "Miguel, here, was liaison with the British. Perhaps you two have met before at the Brigade Delegation on Calle Castello?"

Davie smiled faintly, first at Ferrer then at Miguel whom he did not recognize. A picture of the Delegation office in Madrid flashed through his mind; the huge doorway, the busy courtyard filled with volunteer soldiers from every nation, the offices bright with banners. During the civil war he had not gone to the Delegation building often for he had been a field soldier, but he did remember that it was not where Ferrer placed it.

"It was on Calle Velasquez," he said.

The guerrilla chief waved his hand indifferently, as though this simple test were enough. He acted as though he knew a little more about Davie than he admitted, and he gave Coster the distinct impression that he expected people to know a little more about him than they showed.

"Now, your journey to our mountains?" Ferrer asked.

"No other identification?" Davie asked.

"None. That you used the name Ferrer is enough. It is a signal that the Junta in Madrid sent you. Had you come from the committee in Leon or the committee in Oviedo you would have used another name. Each region has its name for us. Now, your mission?"

Davie glanced at the other men and Cristina. He was eager to talk, but he knew that what he said must fit these men and their capabilities, and he must win them to his plans. Theirs was a permanent base here; he must use its strength, yet not endanger it.

"It is now night," he began carefully. "The morning after tomorrow a special train passes through this region. It carries a small group of rare scientific birds, vultures with swastikas hidden under their black feathers. The Junta has ordered that they be destroyed before they reach the coast where a boat, at San Esteban, is to transport them to South America."

"Do they carry munitions or equipment of use?" Ferrer interrupted.

"Not exactly. There'll be with them one car filled with instruments."

"What sort?"

"Laboratory equipment such as is used by certain scientists."

Ferrer's eye puckered at him dubiously. "If nothing is gained in material," he objected, "is such a raid worthy?"

"These birds are nuclear physicists."

Ferrer nodded. He had understood, but Davie was aware that the others had not. Doubtful frowns creased the faces at the mention of the unfamiliar term. He tried to explain it, saying, "They wish to fabricate atomic bombs. You have heard of the atom bomb?"

"It has not the value of dynamite," the *guerrillero* Miguel put in disdainfully.

"*Hola,* Miguel, don't be ignorant," another contradicted. "Remember when José came to us from Oviedo? He spoke of this bomb which he has seen in the cinema. It is no bigger than a pencil. The Americans carry it in a brief case —yet it is like ten thousand sticks of dynamite. It rears up on its hind feet and kicks powerfully at the sky."

"Is this bomb on the train with the birds?" Explosivo asked with a touch of awe in his voice.

Davie shook his head. "Nay, *compañero.* But the men who possess the knowledge for making it are carried on the train. They have not yet made it. Thus far, only the Americans have made it. But the knowledge is carried by these men, too."

"Why does Franco send them away?" Miguel queried. "It is my opinion we should capture these birds and have them make the bomb for us. We'll have no trouble with Franco then, eh, *camaradas?*"

"It takes more money and more big factories to make such a bomb, a single one, than there are in all Spain," Davie said. "But in South America there is money and the materials. Many Nazis have fled there and there are also native *fascistas* of great wealth and industry who would make such a bomb. Franco is in accord with them."

AS HE spoke he watched Ferrer closely. Except for a slight glow in the man's eyes, there was no sign of reaction from him. It was like talking to a statue.

"This is the plan the Junta asks us to carry out," he explained slowly. "If our information is correct, the train will not be large, but it will be heavily guarded. From the Leon side it will come up through the Pass, but instead of going on through Oviedo to the port of Gijon, it will be switched over another route. The *fascistas* fear an armored train going through Oviedo and Gijon will arouse too much interest in the American and British consulates there. So at the village of Lena, just before Oviedo, it will follow a branch line to the port of San Esteban."

Ferrer had begun nodding. "It is so," he interrupted. "Our men have noticed that the military guard on this small line has been increased in the last days. We could not understand it."

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"They're being cautious," Davie agreed. His glance moved toward the walls of the cavern, seeking a map. For a moment his attention paused thoughtfully upon a huge poster of a republican *miliciano* thrusting a rifle toward the sky. Beneath it was the crimsoned slogan, *Pasaremos.* Finding no map, he took a knife from one of the men and made a rough sketch of the railway line upon the hardpacked earth floor.

"Here," he explained, stabbing a pebble, "between Lena and the town of Grabo, but just before the railroad comes to the highway leading into Grabo—this is where the train should be destroyed."

He glanced questioningly at Ferrer.

"That is not the most isolated spot," the man objected. "It is too near Grabo."

"That is the safest point," Davie replied. "If we deal with an ordinary train then it is best to blow a bridge or plant a mine on the tracks in some isolated area. With this train our methods must be different. We cannot blow bridges for they'll be heavily guarded. We can't mine the track because a pilot engine will run a half kilometer ahead of the train. In any event, we would merely overturn the train. This one is armored. It has a strong skin. We must be absolutely certain the men in it die." He paused, letting his arguments penetrate, then added bluntly, "We must bury the train."

Ferrer's lips parted, surprised. *"Qué idiotismo!"*

Davie came to his feet. "Not so idiotic," he snapped. "But it must be expertly done. There are many tunnels on the line. Like the bridges, they'll be most heavily guarded in the isolated areas. But the tunnel before the Grabo highway should be vulnerable. We shut one end, let the train run in and seal the other end."

The eyes of all the men had widened, touched by a look of respect and wonder.

"It will be very difficult," Ferrer said slowly. "How many men?"

Davie breathed a sigh of relief. "We'll need twenty-five. Two must have communication experience; at least ten *dinamiteros,* some riflemen and a couple of light machine guns. With these we have a possible chance. If I can get a railway man, one whom we can place aboard the locomotive of the train, then the task will stand a good chance of succeeding." He turned toward Cristina, saying, "You know one—Marin."

"Manuel . . . No. Not with Manuel. Anyone but Manuel," she objected. A curious tremor of fear threaded her voice.

All eyes had turned toward her and an uneasy tension filled the cavern. Ferrer smiled at her compassionately, and at the same time shook his head.

"Is it because he is your *novio?*" he asked.

"He can't do it," she replied stubbornly.

"That is for him to say."

Explosivo interrupted. "The plan is good. I am not against it—but I, too, am against using Manuel. This is a plan which must not depend on a single Spaniard being on the train because such a man must be strong and trustful. Marin is a little *flojo.* He is weak and he may not help."

"He's pro-republican, isn't he?" Davie demanded.

"Claro, but there are all degrees of republicans and all degrees of Spaniards."

"If he is Spanish and has been for the Republic I would talk with him." Davie directed his words to Ferrer.

The man hesitated a moment, then shrugged.

"Marin is at Lena. Cristina can take you, but with care, understand."

The girl objected again. "But it is impossible. It is as if—"

Ferrer cut her short. "It is an order. You'll take him."

CHAPTER IV

A MAN OF ANGER

AT MIDNIGHT, after Davie had arranged the details for the guerrillas who would join him at the tunnel and had seen to the equipment which would be needed, he set out with Cristina and Explosivo for the village of Lena. As the gray edges of dawn touched the higher rim of mountains behind them, and the lower slopes and foothills were still as velvet, they came to the border of the town.

All through the long march there had been a painful silence held between the three of them. Only as they reached the town did Cristina speak to him, and then in a tone that was both mechanical and disturbed.

"If Manuel does not wish to see you?" she asked.

Davie glanced at the town placed below the slight rise they were on. It lay still and unawakened, a drab spread of stone houses that eddied tightly around the tower of a church as though moored to a monolithic island. On the far side, beyond the church, he could see the plumed smoke of a railway locomotive in the switchyards.

He looked at the girl again. "Ferrer said it is an order, did he not?"

She nodded vaguely and her ways worried him. He resented trusting the success of a job as delicate and as pressing as this was, to a girl who in some curious way took him for her *novio* and at the same time had another man in the village. She might be mad, totally mad, he though. Yet why did Ferrer trust her? He was too shrewd a man, too careful a leader to jeopardize his forces in such a manner.

"I'll go to Manuel. He lives at the Posada. Explosivo will take you to the villa where you'll wait. You can rest there."

Now, without touching him, without kissing him as she had done before, she went off alone toward the village. It was as if she had taken leave of a stranger.

He turned to Explosivo inquiringly. "Will she bring him back?"

The old man nodded. "If he does not run a train she will."

In the still gray of the morning, Explosivo led him to an estate a short distance beyond the town. Here, behind a free-masonry wall was an orchard of apples and the empty villa of the Duke de Belmante who had fled Spain at the beginning of the Civil War. The Duke, though he had been reinvested in his lands, still considered it safe to be an absentee landholder. The place was deserted except for an old caretaker who tended the orchards in a haphazard manner and had a passion for things red.

"This is Fantastico," Explosivo introduced the caretaker as they entered the orchard. "He is in sympathy with us, but he is sometimes too *antifascista* to agree with our ways. He is also too old to do much. Last year he suddenly discovered he was eighty instead of seventy years old. Since then he has been going down fast."

Davie shook hands with the gardener. The man was indeed old. He was incredibly withered, yet his watery eyes glowed with a zestful passion. He wore a faded pink jacket and a dusty beret. When he grinned, his mouth was without teeth.

"I am too old to wait for another Republic," said the caretaker as he led them to his hut behind the villa. "The younger republicans are too republican."

Explosivo laughed quietly. "Fantastico says he is too old to believe in ballots. There is not enough time for him."

"I am for direct action," the ancient one repeated.

The interior of the hut as they entered it almost overwhelmed Davie with its heavy sweet odor. The place was jammed with a startling clutter of potted flowers and small plants—geraniums, blood roses, fuchsias, flowers blazing in every hue of carmine violence. The old one brought forth a skin of red wine and a reddish shriveled sausage and passed both around.

"In protest against all things are the flowers," Explosivo told Davie. "He grows nothing but red flowers on the Duke's estate. The Duke has a hatred of this color so he lives exclusively in Paris."

"Even the apples, when they reach maturity and the age of reason tend to this color," Fantastico nodded seriously.

Coster could not help but smile. In spite of his years in Spain and his having lived among the sturdy roots of the nation, he was always startled by the strange and unpredictable dramatic attitudes of these people. Their predominantly serious character, their impulse for strong expression, was always innately and intensely dramatic. Sometimes it was touched with an instinct for individual anarchy. At times it bordered on the ludicrous.

When he had eaten and drunk he tried to rest on the old man's straw-mattressed cot. He was only able to sleep in snatches

for his thoughts disturbingly visualized the hours of danger which still lay ahead; the uncertainty of contacting Marin, the preparations for the train at the tunnel. He felt uneasy for having let Cristina go alone into the village. Another of Ferrer's men should have come. Someone who might move or threaten Marin into cooperation more effectively than a girl could. He tried to devise an alternate plan, one which depended less on the railway man's participation; but from the beginning, he realized that without him the dangers that lay ahead were greater and more uncertain than he wanted to risk.

He heard someone stirring about the hut and suddenly felt the old one shaking his shoulder. He opened his eyes.

"Do you have cold?" Fantastico asked.

"Nay, *hombre.* Just restless."

"If you have cold, take this."

A soiled and tattered paper backed book was thrust into his hand. He read the fervid title, *Almanaque del Anarchismo, Barcelona, 1910.* He glanced at its pages with remote curiosity. It contained pictures of all the kings and presidents who had ever been assassinated, and along with them, heroic representations of their assassins. There was also an appendix of vigorous reading which explained how to make Orsini bombs.

"I read it sometimes when I am cold," said the old man lightly. "It kindles the blood."

An added sense of uneasiness filled Davie. "In the village, do they know you adhere to this extravagant creed?" he asked.

The old one shook his head. His watery eyes seemed to peer off into the distance. "In the village I go to church each Sunday and on the Saints' days. But the people down there do not understand. I go because Cristo himself was an anarchist. So I pay him this respect. Only in his time they were not modern, they had no bombs."

BY NOON he had fallen into a restless sleep which was finally disturbed by the sound of voices in the hut. He awoke and saw Cristina and Explosivo and with them a stocky, dark-skinned man. The latter had a square face, a stubborn mouth and eyes that instantly resented Davie as he sat up.

"He is Manuel," Cristina said.

Davie rose and offered his hand. *"Salud,"* he murmured. A resentful *"Buen dia"* was returned, but his hand was not taken.

"Did you take caution in coming?" Davie asked the girl.

She nodded. "No one followed. I am known in Lena. The villagers expect Manuel and me to walk in the country for we are as betrothed." Her eyes flashed toward the orchard outside. "And now, Fantastico stands guard."

Coster's glance moved from her to Manuel Marin in an attempt to weigh the man and his moods. There was something in his face that was bleak and beyond appeal, an expression that made him sharply aware that Marin was violently in love with Cristina; it told him that somehow Marin also sensed that he was not Spanish, but was an Englishman who somehow fitted somewhere in her life. An unveiled jealousy showed in the man.

He began to understand why Cristina had not wanted to bring him to Marin. Instinct now warned him not to look at the girl nor to draw her into his talk with Marin.

"I come with an order from *el jefe.*" He spoke flatly to the man. "You're needed for work in a manner you have never been needed before."

"In what way?"

"Work with a special train which will pass here."

"I know of no special train."

Davie stared at Marin steadily. The man's eyes were dark and stubborn—a man with much bitterness. "Let's not waste time," he said. "There will be a train. I know of it." Now, he fitted his speech so as not to give Marin too much, and yet to give him enough of the picture so he could understand it.

"There is an armored train which comes over the Pass late tonight. It will switch from electric to steam at this station and will go on to San Esteban by way of Grabo. On it we will need a man who can slow it enough to leap free at a certain place, but who will set the controls before leaping so the train goes forward swiftly. Shortly beyond the point

of leaping the train will be totally destroyed. Here, where the switching occurs, we have a chance of putting a man aboard—a man who is known to railroaders at the yard. I have been told there are only two steam-men at this end of track. We can put aside the other and—"

"You think it is that simple" Marin exploded.

"The difficult is sometimes simple."

"It is not simple. It is dangerous."

"Will you take the assignment?"

Marin glared at him, then swerved his glance toward Cristina for an instant. In that brief look Davie read something more of the man—a deep torment, an uncontrollable love and a grain of fear.

"I must know how the train will be wrecked," Marin demanded.

Silence for a moment. Davie hesitated. He distrusted temporizing and Marin left him with the unpleasant feeling that he was an overcautious man, with a caution that covered something deeper and hidden.

"Manuel is safe," Cristina interrupted. "He'll listen. He'll say, *yes* or *no*. What you tell him will not go beyond his lips."

Within his mind, Davie was now thinking that in every operation there was always one point of unmeasurable risk. If it were taken and did succeed, then the dangers ahead were lessened. If it failed, then all his work might be destroyed. The point now lay in Marin's mind and heart. He should take the risk, yet he could not trust the man.

He shook his head. "The safety of too many others depends on what is not said," he replied. "I can only give you this: you'll see a smoke signal on the left of the trackway. It is your warning to leap. A little distance beyond, there will be total destruction."

Marin began to pace the floor of the hut in silence. Finally he looked at Cristina and Explosivo, saying, "Does *el jefe* known what this means? All these years I have been with the railroad and because I have been with it, I have been able to let the *guerrilleros* know the suitable occasion for raiding trains. I tell them which ones carry arms, which transport food. It has been difficult to hold this job and not be suspected by the authorities, yet I have done it. Now, all this is to be destroyed, eh? If the train is wrecked, I cannot appear in the yards again. I must go to the hills. Who will give the information?"

He turned to Davie angrily.

"You have come to wreck what we have built so carefully. No train is of such importance."

Suddenly Explosivo stood before the Spaniard. "The train is that important," he said.

Manuel spat upon the floor, a gesture of disdain. "You will tell me then, *Señor Inglés?*"

"There's much we do without knowing," Davie answered.

"Entonces," Marin's mouth drew back obstinately, "I do not risk my life for something unseen. I will take nothing of this."

Davie's stare met the other's directly, harshly. For an instant a sickening dismay had run through him. It had hardly occurred to him to question the ultimate willingness of the Spaniard. Accustomed to the discipline of the *guerrilleros* and the people of the resistance movement in the cities and villages—a discipline that spelled the difference between life and death—he had not dreamed Marin would reject the plan already agreed to by Ferrer. But now, in the way in which Marin had rejected it, he found something more. Something that was buried deeply in Marin's character came to him. There was not simply bitterness and jealously in the man, there was a little more and he reached for it.

"Is it that you're afraid, Marin?" he demanded bluntly.

The question came to the other like a blow. For a second Marin looked stunned, then his squarish face darkened angrily. He spat upon the floor again.

"I thought it was so" Davie smiled. He was on surer ground now. "You are a republican, eh, Marin? But you are not for the Republic, you are for yourself. You hold a safe job with the railway, you sleep in a bed, you eat regularly. For these blessings you help the Resistance a little. You inform the *guerrilleros* of the movement of trains which they will wreck or capture. You do it only because you have a terror of being blown up on such a train. You have made yourself valuable to the *guer-*

rilleros so that they will not touch your trains, eh?"

Marin rushed toward him, his face burnt with passionate anger, his lips thrust forth in white bitterness. Suddenly Christina stood between them. "Manuel—" she cried in consternation.

The sight of the girl seemed to ease down Marin's anger. He hesitated, glaring past her at Coster, then abruptly left the hut. With a cry of alarm Cristina followed him.

Explosivo looked at Davie and shook his head slowly. "You have destroyed Manuel a little. You have done it before his girl. There is evil in it."

"It's a chance we take" Davie shrugged. "It is better to know than not to know."

"You have told him what we plan. If he does not agree, he must be shot."

Davie dismissed the suggestion. "You had better follow him, but no shooting."

EXPLOSIVO went off and Davie took a deep breath, half uncertain, half disturbed. He tried to right the confusion in his mind. His thoughts had become as mixed as the strong and violent odors of the flowers clashing with each other within the hut. He sat upon the edge of the bed and again considered the plan for wrecking the train without an insider's help. As he considered each step yet to come, the necessity of having someone in the locomotive faced him irritatingly. There was no certainty of death to the train without it.

"Inglés—" the voice from the doorway aroused him.

He looked up and smiled sadly, seeing Cristina. She came to him and sat at his side. "Do not worry over Manuel," she said. "It was but his jealousy which flamed into anger. He'll help us. He will."

He was aware now, not only of the heavy odor of the flowers, but involved in them, her scent. It contained a freshness and youthfulness.

"Marin doesn't worry me," he answered her. "I worry for the men at the tunnel. Without Manuel in the locomotive the danger is greater. We have no way of knowing if the men in the train will become suspicious of what they feel may be on the track. Someone must set the controls so the train does not stop."

Her fingers touched his hand. "But he will help, *Inglés*. He has gone off now to think it over. Outside, he promised me he would agree to think of it. Before dark I'll go to him. I'm sure he'll be with us."

His glance turned toward her swiftly for there was an odd positiveness in her voice which had not been there before.

"What makes you so certain?"

"I am certain," she replied with added seriousness. "You cannot make him do it. But there is a way I can make him help."

A sense of knowing ran through him in a way that hurt unexpectedly. He took her hand in his.

"He wants you for his wife, doesn't he?"

Cristina looked away. "I have thought of him as my *novio*," she murmured. "I have asked myself if someday I would marry him. But I have been afraid because he does not have the character nor the anger of a man. In Spain, the way it is now, women do not ask for just a man. If they come to us as men, they must also have anger. In Manuel I have never seen it. And today—"

She choked and clung to him now in desperation. He thought she was going to cry and he held her silently for a moment, then asked, "Why was it you kissed me yesterday? Why did you say you had known me in Madrid and you knew I would return to you?"

"In Madrid I knew you."

He looked down at her obliquely, his flesh growing a little cold. It was impossible. Mad, he thought. Yet, when her eyes met his he could see nothing of madness in them. Then she smiled, as though understanding his fears and confusion.

"I knew an *Inglés, un hombre puro*," she said. "It is true that he was not named Coster as you are. And his hair was light. But he was as you are. He was an aviator, and we were in love while I was a nurse in Madrid. It was a love of which there is no ending. Between us there was knowledge that we would always be for each other. Yesterday, when you came to us I saw him again. He was in your eyes. The same

look. He was a man with anger in his eyes; an anger which had brought him to Spain to fight for us. I saw his anger in your eyes and I knew."

He stared quietly at the square of sunlight falling through the window and flattening upon the earthen floor at their feet. At last, he stirred slightly, looking down at her and asking, "What was his name?"

"His name was *Inglés.*"

He bit his lip, choking back the emotion that filled him; a sense of hurt catching at his throat and heart. He did not dare ask her of when she had last seen her man from Madrid. He understood with a deep and sudden intuition that the man was dead. He had died over Madrid, she had seen him die, and still she refused to let something from him die. He bent over and kissed her gently upon the lips. When at last they freed themselves from this embrace which each knew could never be repeated, he saw that she was crying. She had sensed that again the *Inglés* was forever lost.

CHAPTER V

A TRAITOR TO TYRANNY

AS SENOR GAZLO motored into the village of Lena he quietly cursed the fact that he had lost so much of the morning in Oviedo and it was now late afternoon. Then, still in the mood for strong thoughts, he went on devising rugged obscenities to fit the Civil Guard mountain patrol which had permitted the terrorist *Inglés* to escape from their very vehicle. The curse, he realized, was totally ineffective for all the guards who had been in that camion had been blown to death. He now vilified their parts, principally because he had found no trace of Señor Coster among them.

The car ran parallel to the crumbling rampart wall surrounding the town and finally turned at the Oviedo Road gate and entered the main street. Gazlo leaned forward. "To the *policia,*" he instructed his driver.

Being a sensitive man, he quickly felt the eyes of the village watching him suspiciously from behind half closed window shutters as he rode through the town. He breathed another obscenity. The heavy suspicion of the people in this region annoyed him. He longed for the tortured dryness of the Castilian plains, the hot distant vistas where one could see a man five kilometers away. Here, the excessive fogs and mists, the overabundant greenness and endless mountains conspired against him, hiding everything.

At the police quartel which faced the church plaza, he went directly to the officer in charge. The local *Guardia* officer was a bony-faced indolent lieutenant who dreamed a great deal about his annual vacations in Madrid. In the interval between vacations he lacked the courage to leave the quartel unless it was utterly necessary and he was well escorted.

Señor Gazlo gave him such an order.

"There is a man named Manuel Marin at the Posada. You'll bring him here."

"Under arrest?"

"As you like."

The lieutenant was upset. He disliked arresting, or even displaying the appearance of arresting people in the town. He had memories of the angry citizenry of Oviedo storming the Civil Guard barracks during the first days of the civil war. He was certain it would happen again and he hoped desperately it might occur while he was on annual leave.

"It's not advisable to arrest," he objected to Gazlo. "Why don't you question him at the Inn?"

"Bring him here," Señor Gazlo snapped. He grimaced with his cherry-red gums. The grimace, he knew, unnerved the lieutenant even more than his papers and official identifications which were too important for the officer to ignore.

When finally alone, he shrugged indifferently as he thought of Manuel Marin. He did not particularly want to arrest Marin. However, following the escape of the *Inglés,* his thinking about Coster had reached an interesting stage and Marin had become involved in it too.

Coster's escape had convinced him that the elusive *Inglés* had already made contact with Asturian guerrillas. Since the incident had occurred along the Leon-

Oviedo Railway, he began to put two and two together and the results gave him an idea of why Coster had moved into the Asturias. Coster, the railroad and Asturian *dinamiteros* could mean only one thing. For a moment he had considered warning the *Seguridad* in Madrid of the situation—perhaps to have them reroute the special train.

However, he resented such a step. The train was not entirely his responsibility. Let the train come through. It would be a magnet. It would lead him to Coster. With a precision that contained traces of Germanic tutoring, he began fitting his plans around the railroad. He searched and sifted and prepared.

Since the train was armored and a pilot engine was to precede it, he reasoned that Coster could not easily blow the tracks with contact mines. With a guard on bridges and tunnels nothing could happen there without those on the train being forewarned. He tried to place himself in Coster's mind and he went over Coster's records carefully. One thing stood out. The *Inglés* seemed to have a brilliant flare for selecting terrain suitable for guerrilla operations. It was undoubtedly the reason for his successes and his elusiveness.

"It's possible," Gazlo thought to himself, "the *Inglés* may attempt to capture the train without destroying it. The threat of explosives is as effective as the use of them." He found an area upon the Asturian map where such a raid could be staged. The terrain was rugged, isolated and unpeopled and it was less than fifteen kilometers from Lena. There a train could be slowed and a raid in force could succeed. "The ideal place to meet Señor Coster," he had mused.

Some hours before appearing in Lena, Señor Gazlo had visited the offices of the railway company in Oviedo. With an adhesive intentness he had studied the records of the line, its list of employees, the guerrilla actions along the line. The search had uncovered something quite illuminating. It had led him to Marin.

GAZLO stared steadily at Marin's square face. This Marin was well-dressed. He hardly looked like a guerrilla sympathizer. His face lacked the hardness. "Undoubtedly one who prefers comfort," he thought. "An easy one to deal with."

He decided to be tactful.

"You are the railway engineer," he said to Marin, at the same time motioning him to occupy a chair in the lieutenant's office.

"*Si, señor.*" Marin answered. His mouth was set and taut, drawn by fear. He stared fixedly at the Falangist symbol, the yoke and arrows, tacked upon the opposite wall.

"You are not a Red, are you?" Gazlo asked.

"No."

"Have you joined the Falange?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"No one has asked me. Anyway, I have no politics but trains. I am a good engineer, isn't that enough?"

Gazlo shrugged his shoulders as if to say he had found reason in the argument. For an instant he busied himself undoing the flaps of his briefcase and rummaging in it for some papers which he began studying. Without looking up from the pages he asked:

"At what time do you pilot the special to San Esteban?"

His glance went toward Marin shrewdly.

"Special? San Esteban?" Marin appeared surprised. "I'm not scheduled for a run there."

Gazlo pursed his mouth thoughtfully. Either this Marin was an excellent actor or he knew nothing of the train. He had shown no sign of familiarity with it, no start, no dilation of the eyes. Somewhat disappointedly, he changed his tactics now.

"You say you are a good trainman," he snapped. "Perhaps you're too good." He shook the papers before Marin's eyes. "An interesting record, *Señor Locomotora.* Four years and not a single accident, no sabotage, no trouble on any of your runs. Remarkable."

"I have had luck," Marin replied nervously.

"*Muy claro,* but almost every other trainman in this region has at one time or another had trouble. The sabotage is regular in the Asturias. So regular I am suspicious of any irregularity in it."

He shook the papers impatiently. "It is obvious," he continued in an icy voice, and with scorn also aimed at the lieutenant, "that you help the *guerrilleros.* It is incredible that there are such idiots among the police here not to have observed this before now. You give the terrorists information about trains. Naturally, they spare your train. Isn't it so?"

The blood had drained from Marin's face. He stared stonily at the yoke above the police agent and replied shakily, "I have no politics. I have never even spoken to one of them."

"Idiot," Gazlo snapped. "Every man has politics. You may have none of parties, but you have politics. Yours are fear." He paged through the dossier quickly and went on: "Ah, here. You see, nothing escapes Gazlo. In 1938, the second year of the civil war, you were driving trains in our zone. Good. At least you were not with the republican scum. Now, in November 1938 a supply train you piloted was sabotaged by Red guerrillas. A bomb on the tracks. You were injured. Hospital—December, January, February, very serious, eh? A man does much thinking when he is alone in a hospital. He can think of ways to protect himself in the future, even to become a traitor to the state."

Marin made an effort to stand up. The lieutenant pushed him back. Gazlo moved before Marin now. "You are in contact with them," he said flatly. "Has there been one who asked you about the special train?"

"No one," Marin answered desperately.

Gazlo turned to the lieutenant. "Fetch me a carbine."

A blending of fear and of anger showed in Marin's eyes. He began to open his mouth in protest when suddenly his glance was held by someone at the doorway. At first, he doubted his vision. Then his lips parted in amazement. "Cristina—" he murmured.

The girl stared calmly at Gazlo and the lieutenant. A civil guard stood behind her. *"Quién es el jefe?"* she asked.

Señor Gazlo grunted, somewhat annoyed at being disturbed in the course of work. Then, as if responding to a delayed impulse, he became aware of the prettiness of the girl. He smiled with all

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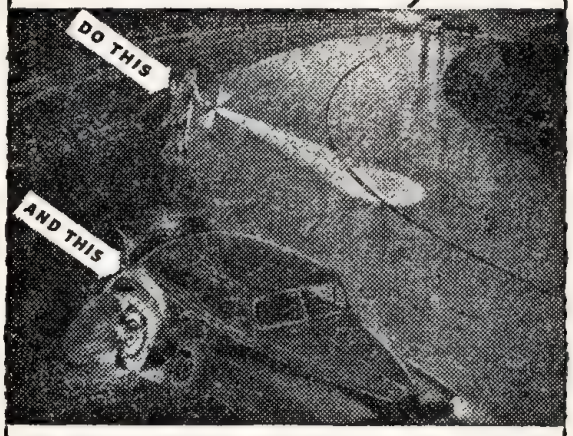

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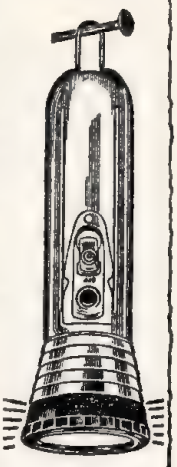

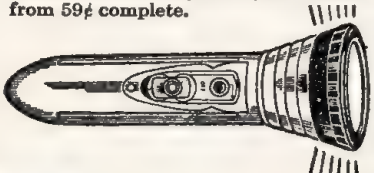

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the power of his bright teeth and gums. "Your business?" he asked.

"I'm from the village of Tres Piños."

Gazlo became alert. He identified the village in this thoughts. Guerrilla village, undoubtedly. No police there.

"I wish to speak of a violence which will occur," said the girl. She looked toward Marin hesitantly. "I would speak alone."

"Speak here," Gazlo interrupted impatiently. "Nothing goes beyond these walls."

She moistened her lips. "A stranger has come to our village recently. He sought the *guerrilleros.* But, of course, there are none in our village."

"A Spaniard."

"He had the look of a Spaniard. He speaks the tongue, yet I had the feeling he is not of this region."

"And his appearance?"

She described the man. Her description was of Davie Coster.

"The *Inglés!*" Gazlo said with sudden animation. "Is he in the village now?"

"He has gone. But I know where he goes."

"Well, out with it, *guapa.*"

She paused again, looking toward the lieutenant briefly and questioningly. Then to Gazlo she said, "This thing is worth much money. Perhaps a thousand pesetas?"

Marin stared at her with startled disbelief.

THE SUN lowered itself from the sky leaving a wake of fire that boiled above the Cantabrian ranges and finally quenched itself in darkness. Within the gardener's hut Davie had watched the glow in the sky and the following blackness. With each change his anxiety increased. Both Cristina and Explosivo were overlong in returning from the town. Even the ancient one, Fantastico, sensed his uneasiness and the possibility of danger; he had gone into the orchard with his shotgun and now lay near the gate.

At eight o'clock Explosivo finally appeared. He seemed moody, as if he were angry, or had been drinking. "Where's Cristina?" Davie asked.

"In the town."

"And Marin?"

"The police have arrested him."

Davie stiffened, a sudden sense of disaster running through him. He grabbed the Asturian's arm. "Did he go to them?"

"Nay, *Inglés.* There is one from Oviedo, a Señor Gazlo, who came into the town."

Davie nodded. At least Marin had not gone of his own will to betray them. And though Marin were arrested, he thought, not much could be given away. He had not given Marin any details.

"Cristina stays in the village to watch," Explosivo said. "She has said we must go on to the tunnel, you and I. We must be prepared to do the work without help from Marin."

Davie shook his head. He did not like leaving Cristina in the town and exposed to the danger of being implicated with Marin. If he talked the police would soon search for his friends and acquaintances. "We'd better get her," he said "She's not safe there."

"It's not her wish. We have work to do and we must leave," the old one replied. "Perhaps Marin will be released. In any case, Cristina will send us a message before dawn."

"We'll have time."

"*Hombre,* it is not a matter of time." The old man's eyes seemed to flash angrily in the darkness. "You would go into the town because you love her. Forget it, man. She is for Manuel. For you and me and for Spain, there is something else."

SENOR GAZLO glared petulantly at the girl seated before him. He was exhausted from the constant questioning he had forced upon her: questions tactfully poised, queries bluntly shot forth, threatening questions. The girl was a curiously proud one; a blunt, hard-bargaining woman. She knew her mind and she understood how to deal. Nothing seemed to frighten her for she had the stubbornness of an Asturian burro.

Because she was identified as Marin's *novia,* Gazlo had thought he could use this to break her down. Instead, she used it for her own ends. She had begun bargaining not only for money, but for the release of her man. If they would re-

lease Marin, she told them she was willing that they hold her until the *Inglés* was caught.

Finally Señor Gazlo relented.

"Bueno," he sighed "I'll let the *Señor Ingeniero* go. Now, where is the *Inglés?"*

"He has gone with a shepherd who sometimes comes to our village. They have gone to the *guerrilleros."*

"Where?"

"They go toward the coast. They did not say where."

"To San Esteban?"

"They did not say."

Gazlo frowned impatiently. This girl had aroused his suspicions by knowing too much, and not enough. Suddenly his hand lashed out, striking her across the mouth. Her head snapped to one side and her lips quivered. A quick hatred flared in her eyes.

"You lie," Gazlo said. It was almost a whisper.

He struck her again, now with his fist and her lips began to swell and bleed.

"They did not say," she repeated.

"So." A fine emotional edge had come into Gazlo's voice. He whirled toward one of the *guardias* who stood near Marin. "The arm—break it!"

Marin tried to struggle free but was held in his chair. One of the guards jerked his right arm out stiffly, another lifted the butt of a carbine, preparing to smash it down upon the arm like an axe.

"No—Señor!" Cristina cried out.

Gazlo ignored her.

"I'll tell," she pleaded.

Gazlo ordered the *guardia* to stop. He faced Cristina and smiled a little. "Love is a very decisive thing," he murmured. "It is stronger than violence, eh? Go ahead, the *Inglés?"*

"They have gone down to where the El Aramo mine once was. With much explosives they say they will blow the tracks and train there."

"When?"

"In the night, when it comes."

"And the English one will be there?"

Cristina nodded.

Señor Gazlo looked at his watch. It was nine-thirty. The train was not due in Lena until quite late and there would be much switching to the other tracks. There was plenty of time. He would have a strong force of soldiers in the hills near the El Aramo mine site. It was not far from the area of action he had himself suspected.

Letting his glance flick toward the girl, he smiled indifferently.

"Teniente," he said to the Civil Guard officer, "Watch her carefully. Perhaps you can get more from her—the *guerrilleros,* the village. Then at dawn a bullet in the head for the *compañera guapa,* without hate, of course, without hate. She can pretty herself before dying. After all, death is beautiful, too."

When she had been taken from the room, Gazlo frowned at Marin. The latter seemed to have lost his fear. He glared at Gazlo with bitter anger. *"Cabrón*—you!" he spat. The police agent shrugged complacently.

"You'll get over it," he said. "She is pretty, but there are many more as pretty. Meanwhile, worry about your trade, *hombre.* Tonight you'll take the train to San Esteban. The *guardias* and I will be in the cab with you. There'll be no slowing down and no stopping unless I say so. We shall see how clean you can keep your record."

CHAPTER VI

THE SPECIAL FOR SAN ESTEBAN

MOONLIGHT gleamed on the tracks weaving through the narrow mountain canyons. From time to time the twin silver bands vanished—a tunnel—then reappeared a distance beyond, threading through the mountains. Davie looked down at the trackway from above and counted the tunnels as he passed them. From this goat path clinging to the mountain flank above the railroad, he observed the approaches of each tunnel: the guardhouses at each end showing a square of yellow light for windows, and in the lonelier stretches, stone maintenance shacks, also guarded. The frequency of guard stations had been heavier in the remote areas. It had begun to lighten now, a sign that they approached the junction with the highway.

At last he stopped, alerted by a signal from Explosivo. Someone appeared on

the pathway before them. Davie came up and was surprised to recognize the Resistance leader, Ferrer. The latter smiled tensely, teeth gleaming faintly against the dark.

"Such a job is too interesting to hear second-hand," he said.

Davie gripped his arm warmly. "Where are the others?" he asked in a low voice.

"Strung along the trail." Ferrer indicated the motionless blackness ahead with a shrug of his shoulders. "Twenty-five, as you wanted; the explosives; the wiring; the batteries and two *máquinas.* The tunnel is about half a kilometer forward."

"Make a recon?"

"Si, hombre. It has a small blockhouse at each end, really a shack. Three soldiers stationed at each. They sleep except for the guard. Behind us, a kilometer or so, is a bridge also with guards. If we fire weapons, they'll hear. Shall we try to eliminate them?"

"No. It may warn them at the tunnel." Davie held Ferrer's wrist, turning it so the light of a quarter moon illuminated it. The time was 4:20. "Call your *cabos,"* he instructed Ferrer.

When the three squad leaders had come up Davie took an electric torch and, holding it close to the ground, traced the outline of the tunnel area in the pathway.

"The guards are here," he explained. "We hit this end of the tunnel first. No guns, no grenades, you understand? There must be complete silence. When we've gained it, two squads—the *dinamateros* with Explosivo and the fighters with young Guernika and I—go through the tunnel to the second post. Those who stay at this end begin the mining operations. We begin in five minutes. The tunnel must be cleared and the dynamite readied by 5:30. Who are the wire-men?"

"Yo—" three voices whispered in unison.

"You have sufficient to go over the tunnel?"

"We can string to Leon if you want to telephone there."

"Good. Well, *salud y suerte."*

He went ahead with young Guernika's group. The six men carefully worked their way down the mountain face until they had reached the tracks. At a touch from Davie, Guernika crossed the tracks and dropped into the shadows of a gully on the opposite side. Davie and the other men followed the left edge of the trackway until the mouth of the tunnel loomed darkly before them. A dim yellow patch of light showed through the window of the guard shack which stood with its one wall against the mountain flank.

It took a moment before he could spot the sentry. The man was seated upon a bench before the shack. Davie measured the distance to the man and weighed the dangers in each foot of it. It was too far to throw a knife successfully—the ground too loose with gravel to traverse silently.

He motioned the men behind him to lie down and wait. They watched him remove his shoes, they saw him select a pebble and put it in his mouth. They seemed to understand, without a word being said.

One of the men passed him a length of rawhide rope.

As unconscious of his efforts as a predatory animal is of its silence, he went alone, making a circuit of the area until her had reached the slope and behind the shack. He slid silently to the shack roof and cautiously inched across it to the point directly above where the guard sat.

At the roof edge he paused, letting his breath come evenly. Lifting himself on one elbow, he stared out across the darkness.

There was no sound at all. Guernika must have timed himself perfectly. His glance flicked toward the mountain slope where he knew Ferrer and the others waited, training a light machine gun upon this hut. The gun was merely a precaution.

He loosened the rawhide cord and felt its suppleness with satisfaction. Taking the pebble from his mouth, he tossed it toward where he thought Guernika must be waiting. The noise of the pebble striking stones cracked the silence. Immediately, there was a cough from the gully.

He saw the guard beneath him stand, rifle sliding into his hands, safety click-

ing. The man's head was but a foot away. The rope hissed out swiftly. In one smooth coordinated movement it looped over the guard's head, twisted tightly about his neck and was jerked upward, killing the gasp born in the man's throat. A moment later Guernika raced up from the gully. His pistol butt finished the struggling figure dangling beneath Davie.

THE REST of the squad had already broken into the hut. As Davie dropped from the roof he heard the sound of struggle within. It was quick and furious and soon over. Guernika appeared again. *"Son muerte, los carbrones,"* he said with a hardness beyond his years. Another man tossed Davie his rope-soled shoes.

"Signal the others to come down," Davie ordered. "All but the machine-gunner. Have the wire men begin to string over the top."

"The timing is good; a little slow, but good," said Ferrer as the others joined Davie.

"Put a man on the telephone in the hut," Davie said. "They'll probably call through to check on the trackway before the train comes."

He watched one group of dynamiters working above the tunnel, making the pits for the dynamite at this end. He nodded to Guernika and to Explosivo whose squad waited with the bulk of the equipment. "Let's go."

They entered the tunnel. Without lamps, with nothing but the feel of the rails and trackway beneath them, they pushed through the immobile blackness that fitted around them, pressing upon their nerves like something alive. Davie counted his steps and when he came to what he thought was the right number, he stopped the men.

The rope looped over the guard's head, twisted tightly about his neck and was jerked upward, killing the gasp born in the man's throat.

"Go ahead with your squad," he whispered to Guernika. "Take the guard-post, then call us."

Within the heavy darkness of the tunnel the men waited anxiously, nerves alive and projected ahead like feelers probing the silence where Guernika and his squad had vanished. The thought flashed across Davie's mind grimly—it was a mark of the condition of Spain when a man could fight beside other men he had never before seen, in a region strange to him, yet their coordination was as though they were brothers.

A light flashed at the tunnel end and Guernika's voice calling the all-clear. Torches went on now in the tunnel. Explosivo detailed three men to prepare the walls and trackway for the charges. Davie measured an area from where he estimated the slide would block the tunnel-end. Explosives were planted back from it, the length of the train.

"Plant it deep," Explosivo warned. "Put much rock on it. The heavier the better."

Davie hurried to the tunnel opening. In the sky to the east a faint warmth washed the darkness, eating at it persistently like a slow acid. Upon the slope above the tunnel, as at the other entrance, men buried dynamite charges and laced a wire from the charges to a battery box and lookout position on the mountain flank above. A battered field telephone there was connected with the observation post above the first tunnel entrance.

Davie returned to the first post. From here he could watch the tunnel entrance as well as the approach of the train. It was now 5:20. Daylight had begun to spread down the slopes. He phoned the post at the far entrance and gave Guernika final instructions: "In twelve minutes pull your man from the phone in the shack. He must run fast and get clear of the entrance in time. Are you ready?"

"Claro."

He took the binoculars from Ferrer and studied this entrance of the tunnel. The *dinamiteros* were climbing up the mountain flank to places of safety. He counted them and nodded in satisfaction. One man had had the imagination to prop up the body of the sentry on the bench at the shack. Explosivo came up toward them. The old man was breathing hard. His face was streaked with sweat and dust.

"It goes well," he grunted as he grunted as he crouched beside Davie.

"Five minutes," Davie nodded.

"If the train comes at all," Ferrer murmured solemnly. He took the glasses back.

"It will come," said Explosivo.

"If Marin hasn't talked too much."

"He hasn't."

Davie looked at the old man oddly. In his speech there had been an angry certainty.

"Cristina was to have sent a message?" Davie asked.

Explosivo nodded. "That Marin would not talk," he said.

"Marin was arrested. How could she know?"

"There is a way—" The old man seemed to choke. He looked as if he were about to weep, yet his eyes were stone dry. "Cristina gave herself to the police," he said.

Suddenly the sound of a locomotive swelled in the distance. The sound turned Davie's attention from the old man. In this moment his nerves grew taut, summing up all the tensions of the past days. Everything was for this moment now. He forgot Explosivo, he forgot Marin, forgot Cristina.

"The pilot engine," Ferrer said tensely.

Explosivo crouched over the switch of the detonator box. Over the field phone Davie warned Guernika. "The pilot engine comes first. Let it go through."

The single engine and fuel car with the tiny figures of armed guards upon it came into view. It swayed upon the rails as it headed toward the tunnel. Ferrer's glasses followed it as it pierced the mountain and vanished into it like a tiny animal scurrying rapidly into its smoke-lined hole.

Guernika's excited voice on the phone: "It comes out here. Fire now?"

"Wait." Davie ordered.

"The train," Ferrer called. His glasses were following the bend of the track as the locomotive with its fuel car and two attached armored cars hurtled through the narrow canyon toward the ap-

proaches of the tunnel. Suddenly Ferrer's voice lifted: "Manuel Marin is engineer!"

Davie stood up and shouted at a *guerrillero* hidden on the slope below, nearer the tracks. A moment later the man's arm arced, then on the left of the track a smoke grenade blossomed whitely.

He grabbed the phone: "Now, Guernika!"

Ferrer shoved the glasses at him and he focused them upon the locomotive. He could make out the figures in it. Marin was there. But all at once his heart sank. With him in the cab there was another man in civilian clothes, a man he had once seen in Madrid—Señor Gazlo. And behind Gazlo was a Civil Guard.

The train passed the smoke point. He could see Gazlo gesturing within the cab. "Marin can't jump," Davie shouted to Ferrer. "He can't make it! They might try to force him to stop. Get the guns ready!"

A dull ominous reverberation filled the air. The mountain trembled as though in a spasm of pain and a cloud of dust lifted into the sky, hovering over the far end of the tunnel.

WITHIN the locomotive Manuel Marin watched the right-of-way with a dazed stare. Through the hours of darkness since pulling out of Lena, tunnels and bridges had come at him and flashed past, etched out by the roiled glare of the locomotive's light. The signals and the boulders and the rocks leaping toward him had become a kind of dulling repetition. The rush of night air through the gear of the engine, the monotonous thunder of the wheels upon steel rails had become as one sound in his ears, repeating—*Cristina*—*Cristina*—*Cristina* . . .

Now, all at once he saw the white plume of smoke blossom along the trackway. His mind fumbled with its meaning. The *Inglés* had said—*Cristina*—*Cristina*—*Cristina* . . . His mind abruptly cleared. The smoke. His signal to slow down, set the throttle and jump. Behind him he heard Señor Gazlo shouting. The voice was whipped by the thunder.

"Idiot, slow it!" Gazlo screamed.

His hand froze on the throttle. He pushed it forward, feeling the added tug of the wheels, Gazlo shouting in his ear. He stared grimly at the tunnel mouth rushing toward them. Gazlo must have realized now how Cristina had deceived him. He had expected trouble much farther back, and when it had not come, he had grown careless. Now, it was too late.

"Stop!" Gazlo shouted wildly. He pulled his pistol out.

Manuel thrust the throttle forward, wide open. "A little further, a little further," he murmured. "The *Inglés* had said that—" Gazlo sprang toward him. He whirled toward the police agent with bitter anger and at the same instant the darkness of the tunnel enveloped them. . .

Davie heard Guernika's jubilant boyish voice over the field phone: "At this end, *hombre,* the slide is truly magnificent."

"O.K., pull out, then."

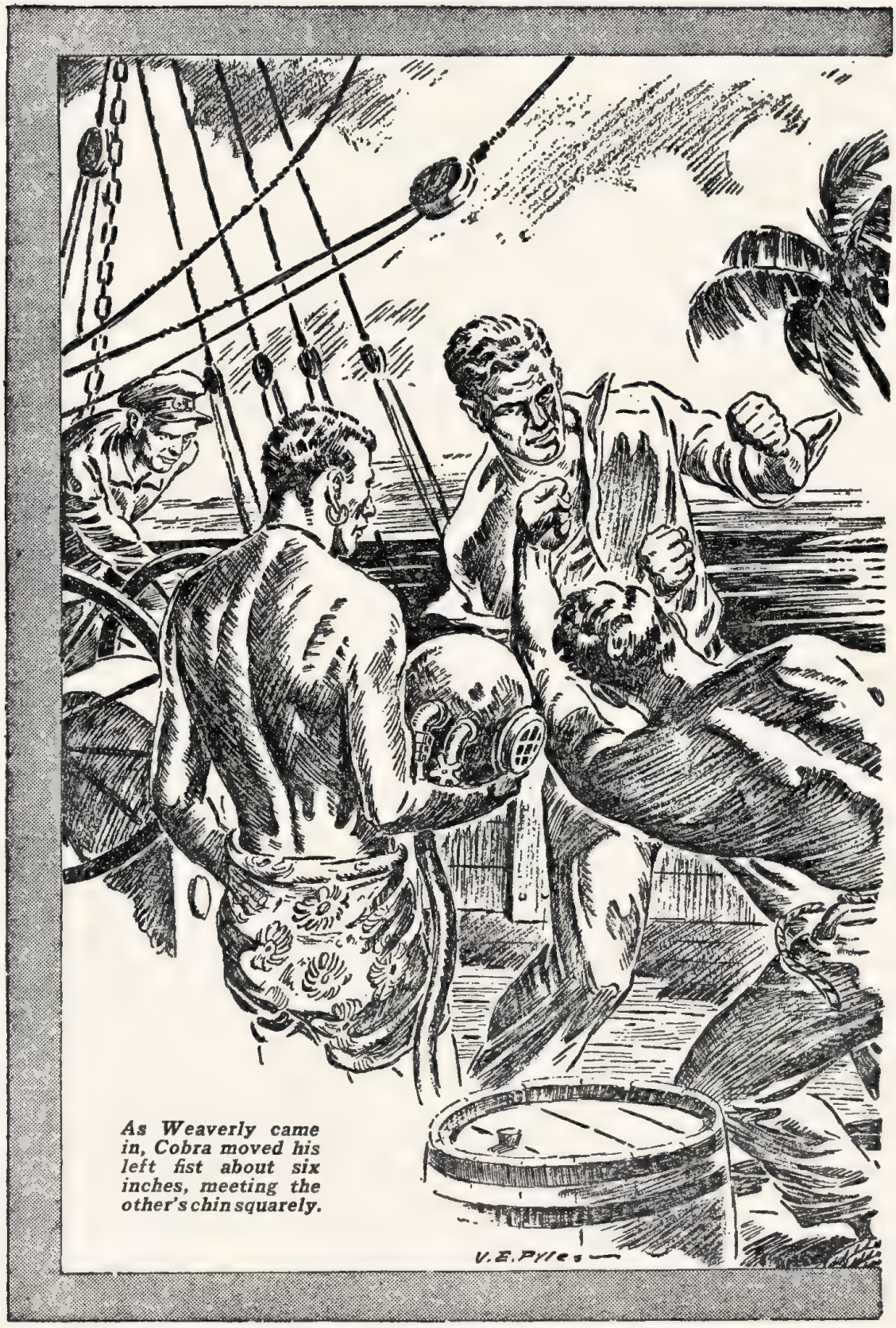
As he put the phone down the explosion at this end of the tunnel was set off. The earth above and at the mouth of the tunnel gave a nervous shudder. Then it lifted slowly, finally bursting with violence. From deep within the mountain a second and more muffled spasm shook the ground underfoot. . .

The dust had begun to settle. On the slope near the base of the canyon the tunnel mouth had vanished. A deep gash of raw rock spread above it and half the face of the slope was still sliding down. Ferrer stared at it soberly.

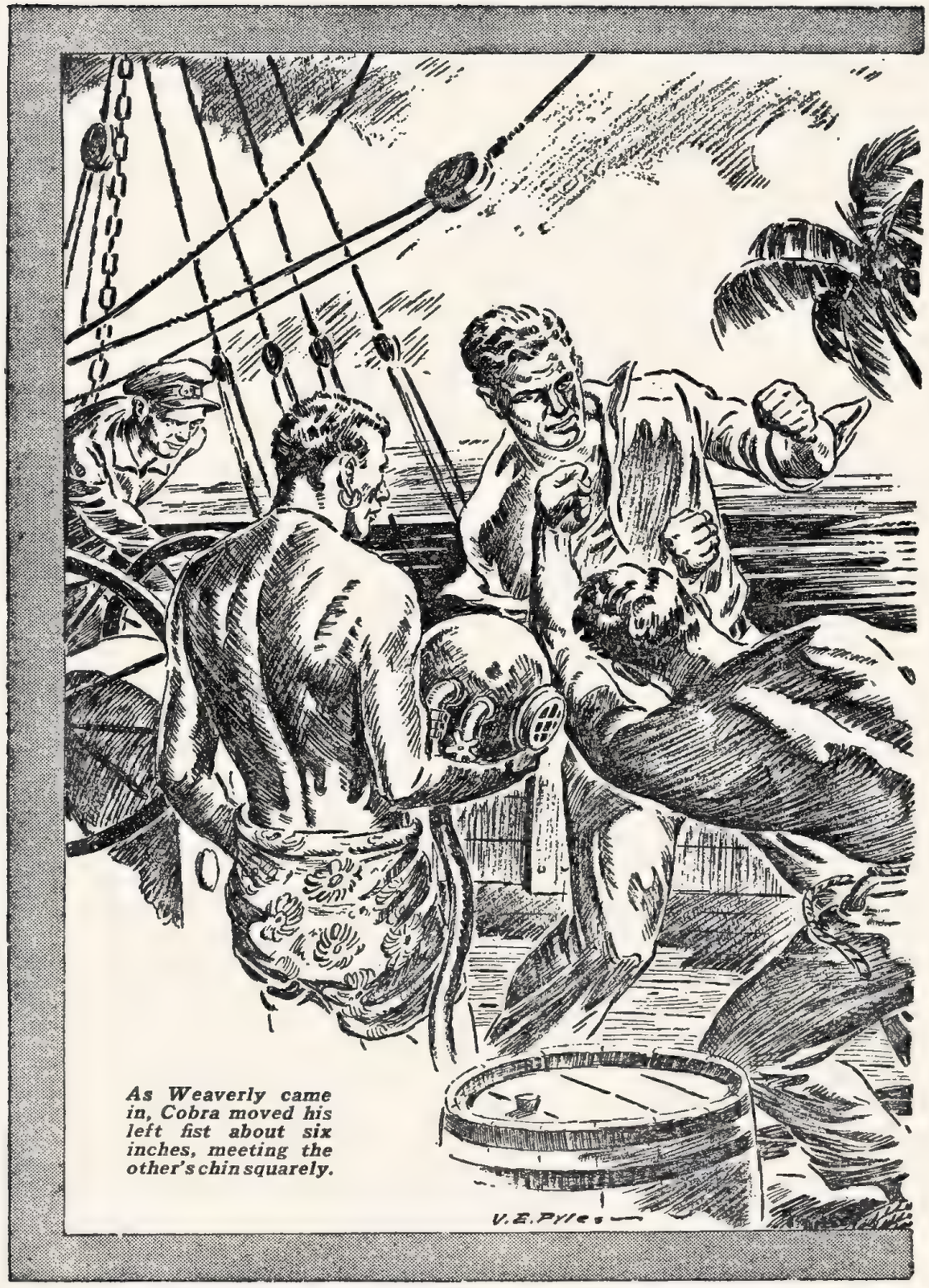
"It will take months to dig out," he said. "And poor Marin, he's in there with bad company. Undoubtedly they are all dead." Then thoughtfully and in wonder, "He didn't even try to jump."

"He didn't want to," Davie replied quietly.

But he was not thinking so much of Marin. Instead, he watched Explosivo who was staring fixedly at the settling landslide. Something in the silence of the old man told him of the thing Explosivo had known all the time and had carried in his heart alone. Cristina had sent her message. It had been Manuel Marin. And he also knew that the old man had lost a daughter.



As Weaverly came in, Cobra moved his left fist about six inches, meeting the other's chin squarely.



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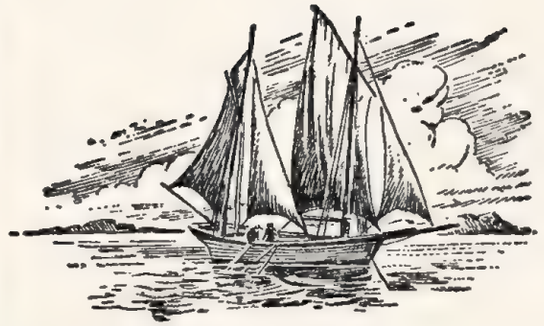


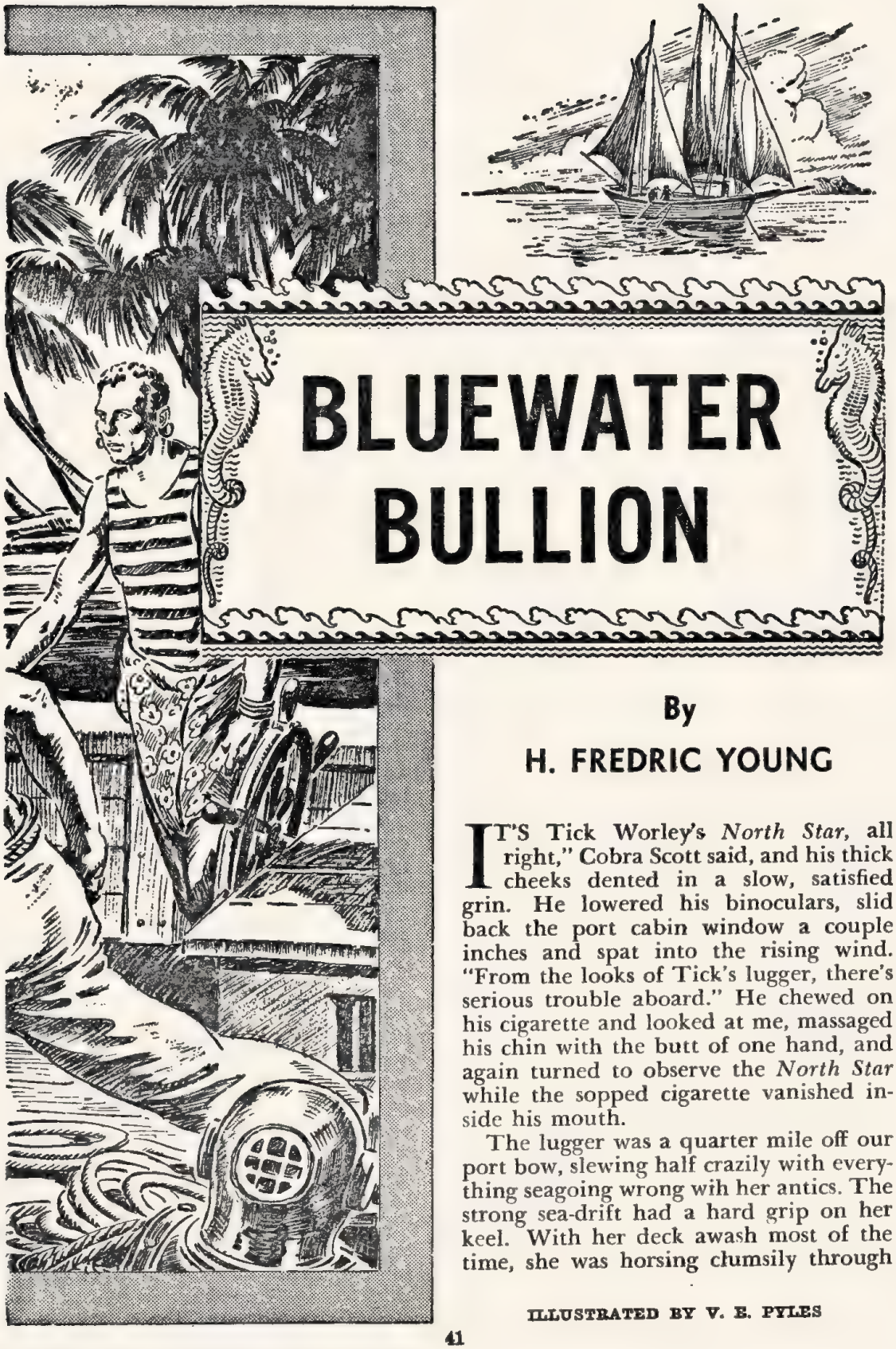
BLUEWATER BULLION

By H. FREDRIC YOUNG

IT'S Tick Worley's *North Star,* all right," Cobra Scott said, and his thick cheeks dented in a slow, satisfied grin. He lowered his binoculars, slid back the port cabin window a couple inches and spat into the rising wind. "From the looks of Tick's lugger, there's serious trouble aboard." He chewed on his cigarette and looked at me, massaged his chin with the butt of one hand, and again turned to observe the *North Star* while the sopped cigarette vanished inside his mouth.

The lugger was a quarter mile off our port bow, slewing half crazily with everything seagoing wrong wih her antics. The strong sea-drift had a hard grip on her keel. With her deck awash most of the time, she was horsing clumsily through

ILLUSTRATED BY V. E. PYLES



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frothy combers which she should've been skimming gracefully, seeing she was a trim-built craft and ought to've had Tick Worley at the helm, or anyway Tick's Celanese boy, Black Murphy.

But there was the possibility Tick had fired his native boy—a habit of his—with himself now stone-drunk on trader's gin at the wheel, and I mentioned this to Cobra.

Cobra watched the *North Star* dip her bow into a choppy swell and toss a head of salt-spray back across the thirty-foot hull. He shook his head and eased the *Kookaburra* out of a trough, and dropped the fuel lever a notch. He spat the mangled cigarette through the two-inch opening in the cabin window and said, "I've seen Tick Worley drunker'n two stones, Jim, and the old goat could still take that lugger through hell at low tide without scraping off paint. Yet there she is flopping about in free water, and listen hard-by and you'll see the engine's fairly clean. . . What the hell's the answer?" He shook his head puzzledly, but I saw he was grinning, too.

For a fact, the engine hum throbbing across that quarter mile of sea was steady, and still the *North Star* was acting like a half-sunk scow with a rank new chum at her helm. She was a good twenty feet shorter than the *Kookaburra,* with trimmer lines, and usually an easy boat to handle.

The sea was rising steadily against us, slapped by a stiff wind whining across the Indian Ocean, with flecks of spume spotting our own deck now and then as we idled along at quarter speed. We gradually narrowed the distance, and now the helmsman of Worley's *North Star* was fighting leeway we could see.

"Maybe he's got a diver over looking for shell," I said.

Cobra squinted at the gray murk hanging dense across the Indian Ocean. It was mid-afternoon, with the hot wind coming in stiff little gusts to pop the rigging now and then like a rope's end. Our Kanaka boys had been skin-diving off Scotts Reef with fair luck on shell but no promising blisters—it was hard for any pearler to forget the Star of the West, a pearl as large as a robin's egg dug out of crusty shell, which brought nearly fourteen thousand quid even before it was fully skinned down—and we were steering north toward Sumba hoping to pick up a few stones that might peel down decently. The glass had dropped a few points, which could mean a nasty night or even a willy-willy storm. Cobra dropped his gaze and shook his head, and ran his stubby fingers back through his matted thatch of reddish hair. His gray eyes remained squinty, and momentarily their usual innocence was gone and they were agate-hard.

He said, "I know what Tick might've been after. . .and it wasn't shell nor stones, Jim." He looked straight at me, licking his lips. "Ever hear of the *Shikoku Maru?*"

My throat tightened a little as I nodded. "She's the Jap raider that ran the gold ingots out of Manila. The gossip went around that she vanished."

Cobra nodded slowly, shifting his eyes toward the *North Star,* which nearly bobbed out of sight taking a comber broadside.

"That's half the yarn, Jim. The *Shikoku Maru* left Manila with nearly two million in gold aboard, and steered for Kuching, Borneo to load on more ingots the Japs had uncovered. She was equipped to melt down the ingots and recast them so they could be identified as Jap; don't ask me why. A pair of Yank P. T. boats got on the Jap's tail and dogged her into Makassar Strait where an Aussie cruiser came in. The Aussie nipped her tail a couple times and the Jap ran south. They didn't want to sink the *Shikoku Maru* unless they had to, what with the gold aboard, and they had her blocked out of the China Sea. Last time they sighted her she was laying a smoke screen behind off Koepang, Timor." He shrugged. "She disappeared from there. Some figured she rammed a mine. Which is probably true. Tick Worley let it slip one time he knew where she lay in about twenty fathom of water."

I grinned over at Cobra. "How many fifths of gin did it cost you to make Worley's tongue loose?"

Cobra stuffed a cigarette in his mouth and began chewing it with his lips, thinking. A pleasant expression crossed his thick face. "I couldn't wiggle any more out of the old cuss, Jim." His chuckle made a throaty sound. "But I knew he

wasn't lying. I figured the haul would be worth as much as a couple million. Tick needed a stake, but he wouldn't let me buy in on the deal. He wouldn't trust anyone. He's been out of port eight, maybe nine weeks now, which makes it about right. Looks like he's having helm trouble out there; the vague possibility exists he'll be needing a tow." He grinned at me and hitched at his rope belt.

THE BIG engine below had been purring sleepily and as Cobra hit the throttle with the butt of his hand the *Kookaburra* lurched forward and water boiled through the port scuppers as he spun the wheel in the direction of the *North Star.*

"Better have the boys break out the tow line," Cobra told me, and I went below to rout out the Kanaka deck hands, while thinking of a couple million quid worth of gold ingots made me tighten up inside. For I knew Cobra wasn't one to be taken in by pipe dreams.

By the time I got back to the wheelhouse, the sea looked more swollen and a brackish green hue, while the *Kookaburra* was quite near the eternally tossing *North Star,* so near now we could hear her gear squeaking above water sound. Cobra jerked back the window and his voice thundered out, "Ahoy, Worley!"

He motioned me to take over, and he swayed out on deck, his big shoulders hunched as he bent forward, peering.

"Ahoy—*North Star!*" he yelled again.

I twisted half through the window for a look at the other lugger's wheelhouse, but spray had misted the glass and I couldn't tell who was inside. One of the Kanaka boys came in the cabin and I told him to take over and I followed Cobra on deck, standing behind him as he leaned spraddle-legged with his hands spread on the rail.

I saw the man about the same time Cobra did. It wasn't Tick Worley.

He was young, maybe twenty-five, a blond giant wearing greasy white duck pants and bared from the waist up. He leaned partly out the wheelhouse doorway, one hand gripping a wheel spoke while in the other hand he waggled a Luger pistol. His grin was flat and menacing, and it was easy to read the deadly meaning in his face.

"Stand away!" I heard him yell huskily.

Cobra eyed the weather. "A man don't have to be God Almighty to tell you you're in trouble, Mister!" he shouted back. "Better let us stand by. . ."

The Luger waggled again. I saw the *North Star's* wheel jerk back and forth as though the rudder might be trying to force itself to bend with the sea tide. The big fellow jerked back inside and wrestled the lugger back on an even keel. She lurched ahead a few rods and her stern ducked and shipped on half a comber.

I turned and motioned our Kanaka boy to pace broadside the other boat.

"You got a jammed helm, Mister," Cobra shouted, hands cupped to his face. "Better look at your glass. If you know how to read one. We're ready to give you a tow."

The big fellow on the *North Star* jerked his head around, and kicked with one foot at the swinging cabin door. "Which way to the nearest port?" I heard him yell.

Cobra Scott shrugged and scratched his head and shook it sadly. Then he turned a thumb toward the sea bottom and made a few descriptive jabs. "There's your port, Mister, if you can't listen to reason." His voice was hot with anger. He turned to face me. "He's got something valuable aboard, Jim. Otherwise he'd be damned glad we came along." Cobra let out a careful breath and I knew he was thinking of velvet. Velvet is the profit on a lugger. You haul up enough shell, or maybe do some trading in the islands for copra or dried cocoanut kernels, which pays your expenses if you have enough luck. But it's the unexpected velvet that counts, and you nearly have to be able to smell it, at which game Cobra was an expert.

He turned and waved at the other. "I'm taking you at your own word, Mister. We're shoving off and you better get ready to pray. S'long, chum!" He signaled the Kanaka and the *Kookaburra* lurched away at full speed.

I caught a glimpse of the big fellow on the *North Star* twisting impetuously toward the doorway, then settling back.

"What's the idea?" I asked Cobra. "You figure he's got something aboard. And besides, where's Tick Worley and who is that big chum in command of Tick's lugger?"

Cobra lighted a cigarette and inhaled pleasantly, snorting streams of smoke out his nostrils. "I couldn't say, my boy," he said, leaving his thoughts sort of hanging in the air. "But I wouldn't worry much, if I were you. I've not given him up yet. Give him a couple hours to think things over. Looks like a hard wind driving in, though I doubt it'll amount to much more'n a stiff blow."

He sniffed and walked inside the wheelhouse and took over the wheel. He held a straight course until the *North Star* bobbed out of sight. Then he throttled down and idled, making a slow turn eastward. In about two hours we brought up the *North Star* again.

She was dead on the water now, tossing like a cork, and I heard Cobra's gloating chuckle. We left the wheel in charge of the Kanaka and stepped out on deck. The *Kookaburra* churned alongside, about twenty feet off the other lugger.

"What the hell!" I heard Cobra say. "He isn't there."

About then the blond fellow emerged from the engine-room hatch, grease-smeared from the waist up and his pants nearly black.

He stiffened at sight of us.

"Ahoy, *North Star!*" Cobra called. "Ready for a tow now?"

The big fellow began pinching his nose, glancing out across the sea on which there was nothing and then yelling, "All right! I guess I'm stuck. The rudder refuses to work."

We maneuvered alongside, and I made a line fast to the *North Star.* Cobra hopped aboard her, pulling a folded paper from his hip pocket. The other stared at him suspiciously.

"What's that?" he asked, and I saw his hand ease toward the Luger butt at his waist.

Cobra smiled amiably. "Matter of a contract for towing you to port," he pointed out, carelessly waving the paper.

"How much?" the other asked.

"Any price should be cheap for you now," Cobra told him evenly. "And by the way, Mister, how come you're aboard this craft? It's Tick Worley's, I happen to know."

"I salvaged it. Was adrift off my island. I'm taking her into port and turning her over to the authorities." A high comber glided under the boat and he lurched drunkenly.

Cobra squinted shrewdly at the other. "Turning her into the authorities, huh? What's she loaded with, Mister? . . . I didn't get your name."

"I'm Clinton Weaverly."

"I'm Cobra Scott. You got shell aboard?" Cobra peered around curiouly.

"Cobra Scott?" Weaverly said, and a curious expression crossed his face. "I've heard of you. I've also heard you drive hard bargains."

Cobra shrugged, waved the paper and grinned as though in appreciation of a compliment. "I've guessed wrong on occasion, Weaverly. Something tells me you got better than shell aboard."

"Matter of fact," Weaverly said, "there's some gold ingots in the hold. I'm turning them over to the authorities."

Cobra's shoulders hunched an inch and his neck spread out a little under his ears. "Glad to see an honest man these days. Of course, she's your salvage if there's no rightful claim comes in from the owner."

I was suddenly aware of what had fallen into the blond fellow's lap. Whether he knew it or not, Tick Worley hadn't a living relative as far as anyone could recollect. He was one of the old-timers in Broome, had drifted in many years before my own time, and as gossip agreed he was a typical sundowner of parts and people unknown. It was entirely possible Weaverly was aware of this. He shoved long blond hair away from his eyes and a smooth grin oiled his lips. "Hadn't thought of it in that light, Mister Scott," he said. "But you may have something."

"Cobra'll do, Weaverly. I've drawn up papers that'll call for a hundred quid for towing you to port." Weaverly rubbed his palms together, but scowled later, as Cobra added softly, "And in case she's yours for salvage, it's fifty-fifty with me."

Weaverly backed off a step, and Cobra sniffed suspiciously at the weather.

"That's pretty high, Cobra," Weaverly complained.

Cobra shrugged disinterestedly. "Business on the high seas is an expensive proposition."

HALF AN HOUR later, with the agreement wadded in Cobra's hip pocket, we'd lashed a four-inch hawser off the stern of the *Kookaburra* and were dragging the *North Star* along at about five knots. We'd stationed one of our Kanaka boys at the wheel of the disabled craft. And Weaverly had come aboard the *Kookaburra* where, as Cobra put it, he'd find better accommodations. But you could always figure Cobra had more reasons than a man's comfort on a deal this size. He cleaned off his own bunk amidship and put clean blankets on it for Weaverly.

After Weaverly had bathed below in our salt-water shower, and slipped into a pair of Cobra's clean duck pants—lapping them over several inches to fit his lean, hard waist—he came up the companionway to where Cobra was stretched out in the shade of the deck winch with his bull neck supported in the cup of his hands and a cigarette, wet nearly to its unlighted tip, dangling from his lips. Cobra got to his feet and greeted Weaverly with a grin.

"I imagine you could bear up under a pahit or two by now, Weaverly," Cobra said. "You've no doubt had a rough time of it on the *North Star*. And besides, I'd like to drink with a man honest enough to head for port with half a million in bullion." He turned to me. "Jim, break out a fresh fifth of gin and the bitters and we'll go to the galley and drink a few toasts."

After we'd had a round of three pahits, Cobra drinking them slowly and blinking each swallow, he removed the signed agreement from his hip pocket and tossed it on the table.

"That piece of paper calls for peanuts, Weaverly." I watched Weaverly's eyelids drop with a quick motion, though he said nothing then. Cobra's amiable grin began working slowly at his mouth corners, and he sighed and leaned back in his chair. "You and me could do big business, Mister. Big enough, as I say, that'd make this agreement call for pocket change. I got diving equipment aboard." He shrugged, letting his suggestion hang in the air.

Outside, the wind whined in a stiff gale and seawater sloshed noisily across deck, sending shivers through the *Kookaburra* and banging the tin roof we'd nailed on the wheelhouse when we'd bought her as salvage and done our own repairs in Broome. She lurched roughly a moment, glided to starboard and Cobra frowned my way.

He said, "Mighty be a good idea if you stayed on deck a while, Jim. We might pick up a willy-willy storm, though I doubt it. You got to keep an eye on that hawser, and take a squint at the *North Star* and see she's still fast by."

I grumbled because by the sound of the *Kookaburra's* engine it was plain she was yanking the disabled lugger along first rate. I went on deck, hearing Cobra's smooth voice behind me.

The sun had set in the direction of Torres Strait and that way the sea was brassy green, but eastward with twilight gloom settling fast it looked none too promising. I glanced at the hawser lashed to our stern, saw it lift a hundred feet back to the bobbing prow of the other craft, and got the sextant from the wheelhouse and shot our position. The answer I got made me go at a half run for the native boy at the wheel, cussing.

"What the hell, Leo!" I snapped. "You been into our gin? You're steering in circles."

The boy's white teeth flashed in a coy grin. He nodded, made a circular motion with one hand, and remarked, "Cobra tell me that."

He glanced at the compass, back at me, and grinned once more.

I groped for a cigarette, handed one to the Kanaka, lighted up and went forward to my bunk and had a drink of gin. I didn't like the looks of Weaverly. I didn't like the friendly passes Cobra was making at the fellow. But I could smell a deal brewing. The first stages of it were over with about an hour later when I got aft again to the galley.

Cobra, on one side of the chow table, was rubbing his chin, shrugging, and grinning woodenly. Opposite Cobra was Weaverly, his palms together while he licked nervously at his lips. Between them was spread a deck of cards, while

at Cobra's elbow was his wallet, empty I could see.

"For a fact, Weaverly," Cobra was saying, "I've never seen such a run of luck. You've cleaned me of money. . ." His eyes slid along the table to the agreement they'd signed.

Weaverly scooped the cards into a pile, and began riffling them. I turned to watch his fingers, and they worked like something greased.

"It's my lucky week, seems like," he agreed. He also glanced at the agreement, and his fingers began trembling on the cards. But he was a shrewd chum, because his gaze went back to the cards and with a quick motion he started to shove the deck aside.

Cobra reached out and grabbed his wrist. "Just a minute, Mister. I've one more thing before I get down to bedrock and the *Kookaburra*. That agreement might be worth several thousand quid to either of us. It'd make a nice final pot." He looked straight at Weaverly now. "What say, Mister? One more hand of stud for the agreement."

Weaverly nodded slowly, and his lips tightened a little. My stomach began pinching together and I sloshed some gin down my throat.

"My deal, I believe," Weaverly said.

"Of course," Cobra agreed. He reached for the gin bottle, tipped it back and closed his eyes as he swallowed, and set the bottle down, wiping his chin with one forearm. He reached out, cut the deck indifferently, and I watched the other carefully replace the cut, then fold his large left hand under the deck with his fingers interlaced across the top. He tossed a card face down across the table at Cobra.

Cobra nodded, flipped the card face up with his thumbnail, and grunted, "Deal 'em all out. Best hand wins."

He fumbled for a cigarette, dropped the pack on deck at his feet, and bent over to get it with his head half under the table.

My eyes darted to Weaverly's fast-moving fingers. I could nearly hear the second-card hiss as it came out and was dealt to Cobra, sliding over and stopping in exact line with the others.

"Wait a minute!" I yelled, and I made for Weaverly.

Weaverly half rose from his seat, his lips in a flat grin and his eyes looking like they'd been fried.

Cobra's face came over the table edge snarling. "What the hell, Jim!" he said. "I thought I ordered you to stay on deck and keep an eye on that hawser!" He glared at me.

I glared back, and I saw his neck bulge out to make a rising hood below his large ears.

"Damnation!" he roared. "Who's skipper of this lugger?"

I whirled and stumped up the companionway to deck. I didn't need to ask. I knew from now on we were towing the *North Star* free of charge, and I was aching to slam a punch in Weaverly's gut.

I relieved Leo at the wheel while he had chow, and steered the course Cobra had set down. Our position was approximately a hundred miles east-by-north of Scotts Reef, and the wind was chewing the water into a messy froth but holding steady to a stiff blow.

It was nearly midnight when I saw Weaverly emerge from the aft companionway, stagger forward drunkenly and fall into Cobra's bunk forward. I stalked into the galley and glared at Cobra.

"Tell me we're working for Weaverly now," I snapped.

He was staring at the bulkhead dreamily, and nodded.

"We're working for Weaverly," he agreed.

I cursed a while, reached for the gin bottle and found it empty. "That damned jackaroo was cheating you blind, Cobra!" I yelled. "Dealing second-card right under your nose."

Cobra shrugged a couple times, puffing away at a cigarette whose fire had been doused with saliva and he chewed it with his lips and seemed to think the matter over. "Why, Jim," he chuckled reproachfully. "He's proved himself to be an honest chum by the fact he's heading for port with all that bullion. Don't you see, you got to trust a man like that." He drew a soft breath and rocked back in his chair with ponderous ease.

"You damned underhanded crook," I had to chuckle. "You've got him splayed over a barrel right now and you know it."

Cobra waved sadly at the torn remains of the agreement scattered on the galley deck. He nodded his head at his empty wallet. "You flatter me, Jim, in my moment of distress. He owns everything, lock, stock, and barrel. We played one more hand after you left."

"HE'S QUITE a genius, this fellow Weaverly," Cobra finally said.

I'd broken out a fresh fifth of gin, and he waved it toward me grinningly.

"He owns a small island off the Benjoar-Savou group—claims he's a horticulturist from Stateside, and is developing a new type of rubber-producing tree—something of that sort, anyhow. He's taken two species of the damned tree and done some grafting. I dunno—he c'n explain it, I can't." He spat out a mangled cigarette and I tossed him another. "Point is, Jim, he was out fishing one day in his own boat and saw the *North Star* working a diver off Benjoar. He'd seen Worley's craft there for some weeks, off and on. Figured they'd struck a rich shell bed. One night a willy-willy storm ripped across that area and, Weaverly says, late the following afternoon the *North Star* drifted in on the tide toward his island."

Cobra blinked at the bulkhead a moment, drawing a soft breath. He continued after a moment. "There was no diving gear on deck, and no one aboard, Jim. Which might mean the willy-willy hit unexpectedly, like they often do. Maybe Worley was in deep water, and his native boy lost his head. . ." He shrugged. "There could be a dozen answers to that one."

"And maybe," I snarled, "this jackaroo Weaverly watched Tick from a distance with glasses and saw what he was bringing up. And maybe he waited until Tick was below, and picked Black Murphy off with a rifle and came on in to toss the compressor and gear overside on Worley's head."

Cobra didn't appear to be listening to me. His voice drifted quietly on. "It all boils down to this, Jim. Weaverly is the only one knowing exactly where Worley was operating. I doubt if Tick had lifted much more'n a fourth of the haul out of the *Shikoku Maru*. Which means there's a fortune left down there under water."

"So we draw deck wages while we make a millionaire out of Weaverly," I growled "I don't like it!"

Cobra smiled over at me. "Go up and lay a course for Benjoar, Jim," he said. "I'm feeling rather sleepy. Think I'll turn in."

As I checked our position, we were due south of Benjoar a couple hundred miles. The sky starred up early, then sheeted over with cloud, and it rained a steady downpour until morning. Two or three times, until I was relieved at four A. M., I'd seen Cobra pacing forward and aft. He seemed to have a load on his mind, though you could never tell much about what Cobra was thinking, and it was just like him to be wondering if we had enough gin aboard to see us through the voyage.

I slept till nearly noon, and when I got on deck there was Weaverly inspect-

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ing everything with the smug grin of a new owner, which he was, for a fact.

He seemed particularly displeased with the dirty condition of the deck, which was smeared with pitch that had bubbled from the seams in the tropical heat.

"As soon as you've had breakfast, Dailey," he said, "I'd like to see you and the native boys fall-to and stone down the deck. It looks pretty nasty."

I took a step for him, and he bowed his arms invitingly. Then Cobra was clearing his throat noisily through the open window of the wheelhouse.

"Come to think of it," Cobra said, "Mister Weaverly is right, Jim. We've talked it over many times, and we just as well get it done with." He ducked around and I could see him squinting at a chart tacked to the bulkhead inside. And I wasn't sure but what his shoulders were shaking some.

Weaverly paced along grinning like an ape, the butt of his Luger sticking above his waist. I sized him up a moment, and he looked all hard muscles and fast-moving bone. I swore to myself I'd have it out with him some day. . .

WE BROUGHT up the mangrove shoreline of Benjoar the second evening about dusk. The sea was glassy smooth, silky blue and rolling gently, and inshore a school of porpoise were playing leapfrog in the surf. We anchored offshore a hundred yards, and at daybreak were hoisting the diving gear out of the forward hold, with the *North Star* at anchor in a cove.

"We'll ease into shallow water, Jim," Cobra told me, "and give Mister Weaverly some lessons in diving. And no rough stuff, understand? He's going down with me."

"To protect his interests!" I snapped. And I began yelling at the native boys.

He was a strapping man, two inches higher than Cobra's six feet, but we managed to squeeze him inside my suit.

"That leaves no extra outfit on deck in case you get fouled down there and someone has to untangle you," I warned Cobra.

He waved off my warning with an irritated shrug. He squirmed into his own suit as we steered slowly in toward the cove where the *North Star* was at anchor.

"There's not much to watch in diving," Cobra assured the big blond fellow. "The air coming to you'll smell of stale rubber until you get used to it. When you get below you'll push against the water to walk. And keep your eyes sharp and avoid any dark spots. They'll probably be deep holes." He shrugged. "I'll be alongside you."

Cobra took a last drag on a cigarette and flipped it overside into the water. The boys were already fitting my helmet down on Weaverly's wide shoulders. He smiled with a nervous jerk through the face plate.

As they were ready to step overside onto the rope ladders dangling in the water, Cobra stepped over to Weaverly and pressed his helmet against the other's, and through the face plate I could see Cobra's mouth working. I couldn't hear his words, though I knew Weaverly could as helmet-to-helmet contact allows divers to converse in piping tones, even under water. I figured Cobra was giving him some last minute advice.

Cobra went over first, giving me a slight wave of one hand as blue water settled over him. I glanced at his bubble stream, checking them. Weaverly was bent over the rail, his monstrous shoulders hunched a little inside the canvas, and he must have watched Cobra settle like some grotesque fish from another planet to the twenty foot depth we were in before he decided to follow.

The ocean floor here was clean save for a fairyland forest that swayed knee high, with white sand glistening prettily in patches, and tropical fish making colors shooting in and out of weed. The silvery green that is daylight under sea made dancing white shadows of them. I watched them a while, and they went under the *North Star* and as they came back I saw Cobra actually leading the big fellow around. I glanced at Weaverly's airline, and at the ship's axe lashed to the side of the wheelhouse, and I thought how I'd like to see the two get together for one split second. The idea of Cobra handling the big fellow with kid gloves burned me up, and it wasn't like him at all, when all we had to do was make shark bait of the jackaroo and

we'd be on our own again, with bullion to burn.

They were up and down several times before noon, and we edged our craft into deeper water each time to give Weaverly a taste of depth by degrees. The heat was sweltering, with the deck seams bubbling and mirages distorting the horizon. We had a few pahits for lunch, and Weaverly indicated he was ready for the deep stuff.

About mid-afternoon, we arrived at the grounds where he claimed he'd seen Tick working.

Cobra had his shark-knife in the sheath at his waist this time, and he tried his deepwater flashlight to see it worked.

"We'll be deep this time, Jim," he warned me, "so watch your business sharp. Keep on the telephones and let the boys handle the compressor. It's a bit risky walking on a hulk that's lain long enough to rust out." He turned to Weaverly. "Better let me take care of all signals, Mister Weaverly. If there's a foul-up of lines, I'll know the way better'n you."

Weaverly nodded, his cheeks fish-belly white. "I'll leave everything to you, Cobra," he said.

We shifted positions twice within an hour before I heard Cobra's voice over the telephone say, "We've got her this time, Jim, I'm pretty sure. How's the weather look?"

"All right," I grumbled.

"Sharks?"

"No sharks around," I told him.

"She's laying on her starboard side about a third buried in mud," he said. "Some kelp, but not bad at all." Then I heard his voice rise sharply, and I figured he was leaning into Weaverly's helmet. "Better stay right behind me, Mister Weaverly!" And I was suddenly glad it was Cobra carrying the shark-knife, and not the big fellow.

"We're inside," I heard Cobra's voice say. "She's in fair shape. . ." His voice drifted away, and for a while the tunk-tunk-tunk of the compressor behind me was the only sound aboard.

A half hour passed, and I was getting half nervous with sweat pouring off my eyelids and making a stream into my lips. I finally leaned into the mouthpiece of Cobra's phone. "How's everything?" I asked.

I heard his soft chuckle. "God Almighty, Jim! I forgot you were up there! We're knee-deep in gold ingots!"

For a moment I forgot Weaverly, and my muscles pinched with excitement. "Shall I send down a shell basket?" I yelled.

"Plenty of time for that," Cobra said evenly. "We're coming out of the hull now. Stand fast on the phones!"

Five minutes later I heard one of the Kanaka boys scream out brokenly. I whirled from the rail, and he was dancing up and down and jabbing his hand at the gauge of Weaverly's airline. The needle was making a nose-dive for zero, bounced back and forth a few times crazily. I jumped for the telephone.

"Cobra!" I shouted hoarsely. About that time I saw Weaverly's hose working to the surface shooting white bubbles. "Weaverly's airline is—"

"Don't get excited, Jim," Cobra laughed. "I just whacked his hose in half with the shark-knife. I turned off his valves, so there's really no great worry unless. . ."

I GRABBED the receiver on Weaverly's phone. I could hear him making sounds like a gigged walrus, a sort of stricken grunt he couldn't quite work out of his throat. But I knew he was in no immediate danger of suffocating as there was enough air inside his suit for seven or eight minutes. And suddenly I knew there was more pressure than water-tons in that twenty fathom of serene looking blue water. I knew how the big blond chum felt. I'd been trapped there a few times myself; you see things through your face plate, a minnow takes on the proportions of a whale, and space narrows down to squeeze you nearly breathless.

I couldn't hold back my glee. "Weaverly!" I shouted. "How's the air down below? Plenty up here—"

I heard him squeak, and I twisted toward Cobra's phone just to see how he'd work it.

His voice thundered out to Weaverly, and I knew he was jamming his helmet against the other's.

"You killed Worley and his boy!" Cobra yelled. "Didn't you?"

"No! No!"

"The hell you didn't!" Cobra shot back at him. "You slipped up and killed the native boy and dumped the gear overside on Tick's head. You better talk, Mister! There's enough air inside your suit to keep you alive five minutes. . .I could touch your suit with my knife and the pressure down here'd make jelly of you. I've left orders topside not to haul you up unless I signal. You want to talk, or—"

Weaverly made a few parrot squawks inside his helmet, and I heard him fighting inside the canvas suit as though he craved liberty more than anything else. Suddenly his voice fairly shrieked, "I'll talk! Anything you want— Just tell them to haul me up!"

"You'll do your talking down here, Mister, and fast!" Cobra roared. His voice softened to a purr. "Tell me just how it happened. . ." He must have realized Weaverly couldn't hear him, for he repeated himself thunderously.

Weaverly began babbling like a crazed man, and I took it down in my head. He'd watched Worley hauling up the ingot, and when Tick was below he came aboard making friendly talk with Black Murphy, shot the native with the Luger, and that was about all.

It was an hour later, with Cobra stretched out on deck dressed only in a pair of dirty duck pants, and not wearing shoes. It was getting dusk, and the heat hadn't let up any, and we were all mopping sweat. The cigarette in Cobra's half amused lips was sopped to its very end.

Weaverly was squatted against the wheelhouse a few feet away, thoroughly subdued and his face still somewhat greenish, with his eyes glaring down at his hands. And I saw his face lift, and he squinted shrewdly at Cobra, one hand making nervous motions at his long blond hair.

"Too bad you didn't wait until you had a witness before I talked, Cobra," he said, laughing nervously. "My word against yours, y'know."

Cobra blinked a few times at me, then he raised lazily on one elbow. Weaverly's Luger was ducked in his hip pocket.

"Oh, I took care of that, Mister. Y'see, Jim here was listening to you on the phone—"

The big fellow leaped from his squatting position toward Cobra, screaming curses. Cobra half rose, and as Weaverly came in Cobra moved his left fist about six inches, meeting the other's chin squarely. Cobra settled back again with a satisfied grunt.

"Toss him down in the storeroom, Jim. Better leave him a bucket of water to douse his head when he wakes up."

We shifted the bullion from the *North Star's* to our own hold, and left the disabled lugger at anchor in the cove. We were making headway northward, through the Arafura Sea.

"Manila?" I asked Cobra, scowling suspiciously.

He nodded. "Yes, Jim. Y'see, I figure the new Philippine government can use some change in their till. What with this we've aboard, and that yet to be salvaged. . ."

I grinned. "And the salvage contract will go to us."

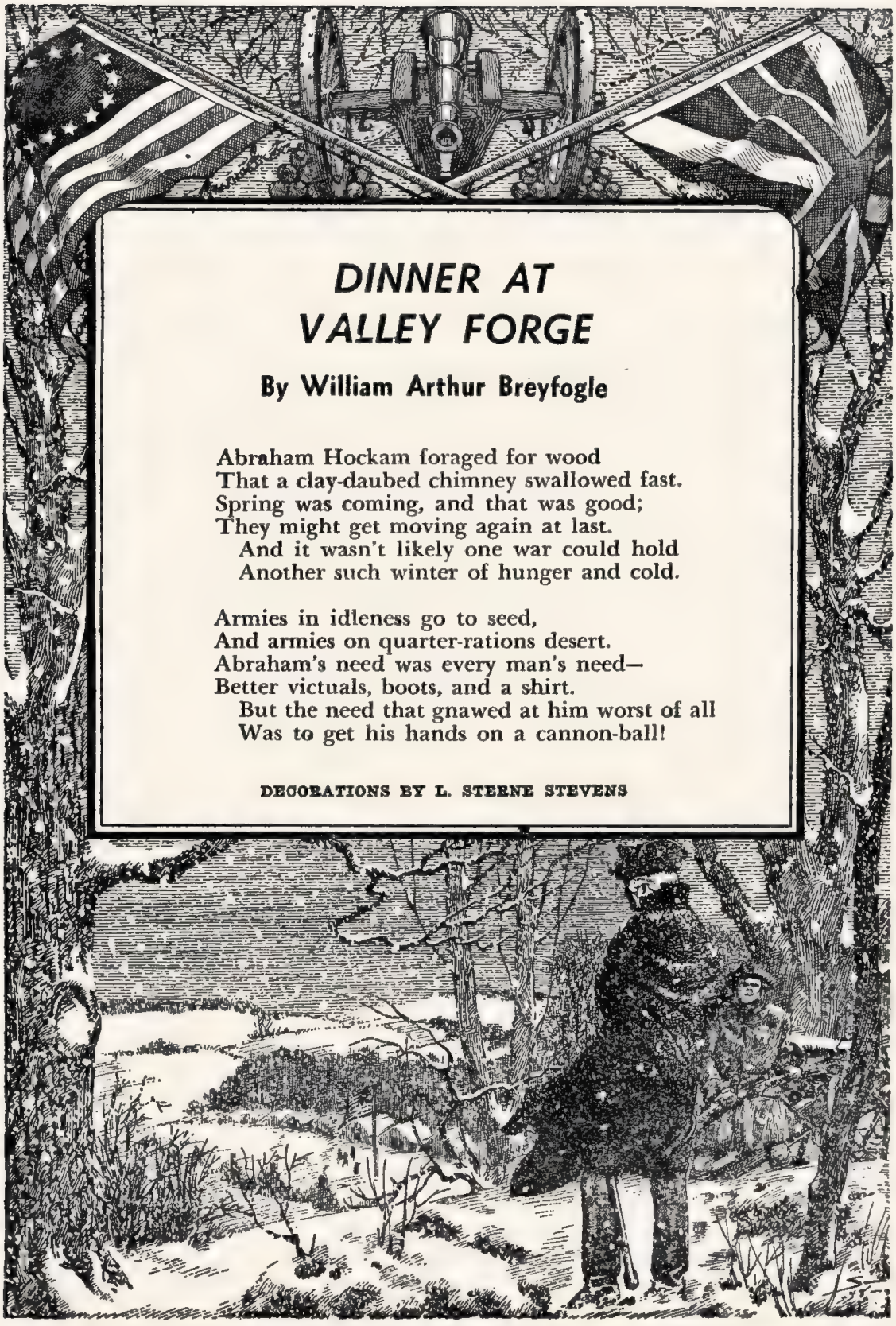
Cobra nodded, and didn't reply otherwise.

I said, "And the price will be high; maybe three times normal?"

"It's dangerous work, Jim," he complained. "What with that hull rotted and caved and rusted. . ." He rolled his eyes at the evening sky.

"And by the way," I said, "how'd you figure Weaverly did kill Worley? He just claimed to be too honest. That it? Hauling that bullion to the authorities, knowing the owner was dead, and sitting around like a hawk putting in a salvage claim himself." Cobra grinned noncommittally. "And to prove he was a crook after all," I added, "you got him in that card game, gave him the opportunity to cheat, which he did."

Cobra rolled over on one elbow. "You may have a point there, Jim," he admitted sleepily. "But let's be more practical about the thing. When we were doing all that practice diving in the cove where the *North Star* was anchored, I had a chance to inspect the rudder. The reason Weaverly had helm trouble was because a lot of air hose and hand line was tangled in the rudder. And it looked as if it had been hacked with an axe. . ."



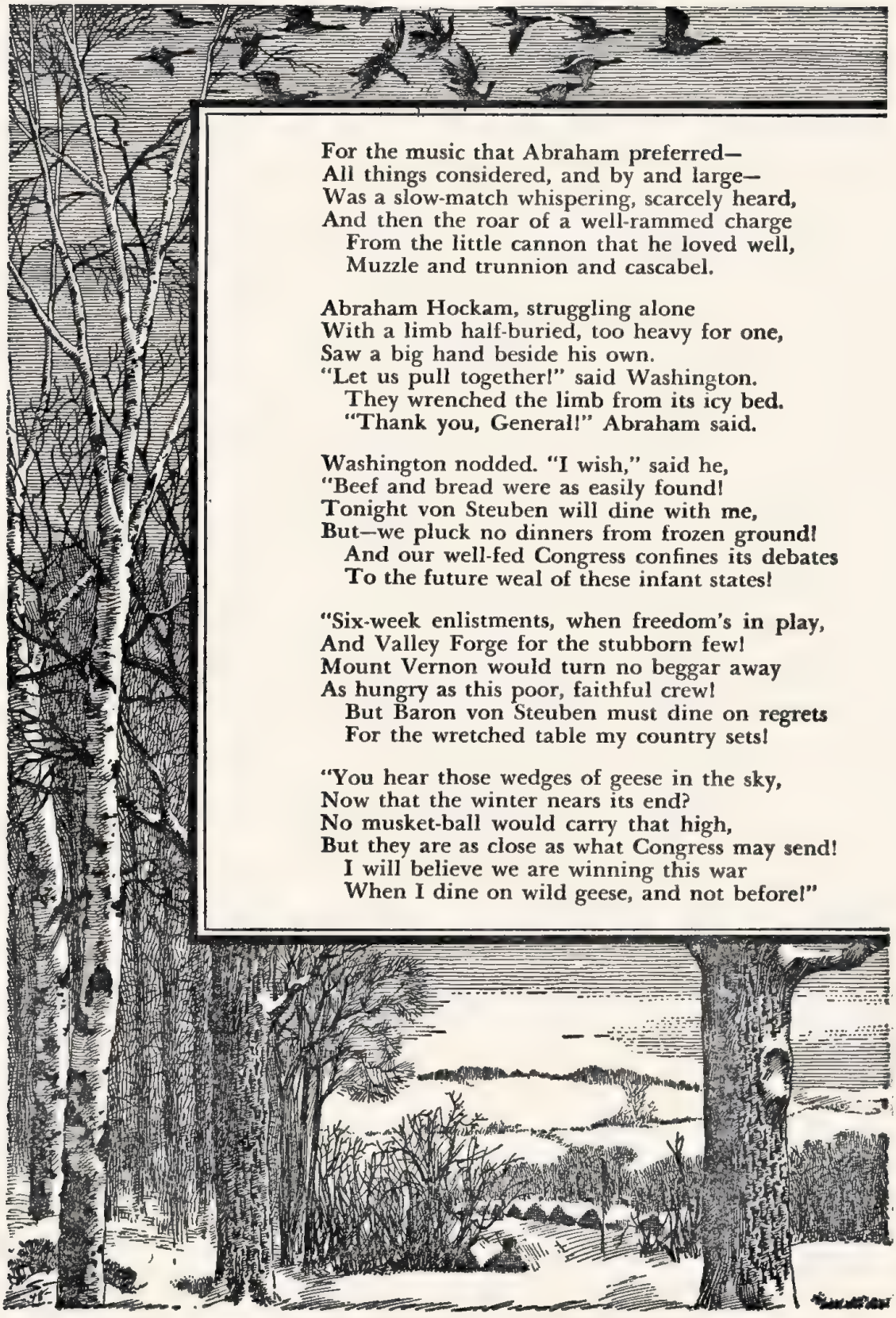
DINNER AT VALLEY FORGE

By William Arthur Breyfogle

Abraham Hockam foraged for wood
That a clay-daubed chimney swallowed fast.
Spring was coming, and that was good;
They might get moving again at last.
  And it wasn't likely one war could hold
  Another such winter of hunger and cold.

Armies in idleness go to seed,
And armies on quarter-rations desert.
Abraham's need was every man's need—
Better victuals, boots, and a shirt.
  But the need that gnawed at him worst of all
  Was to get his hands on a cannon-ball!

DECORATIONS BY L. STERNE STEVENS



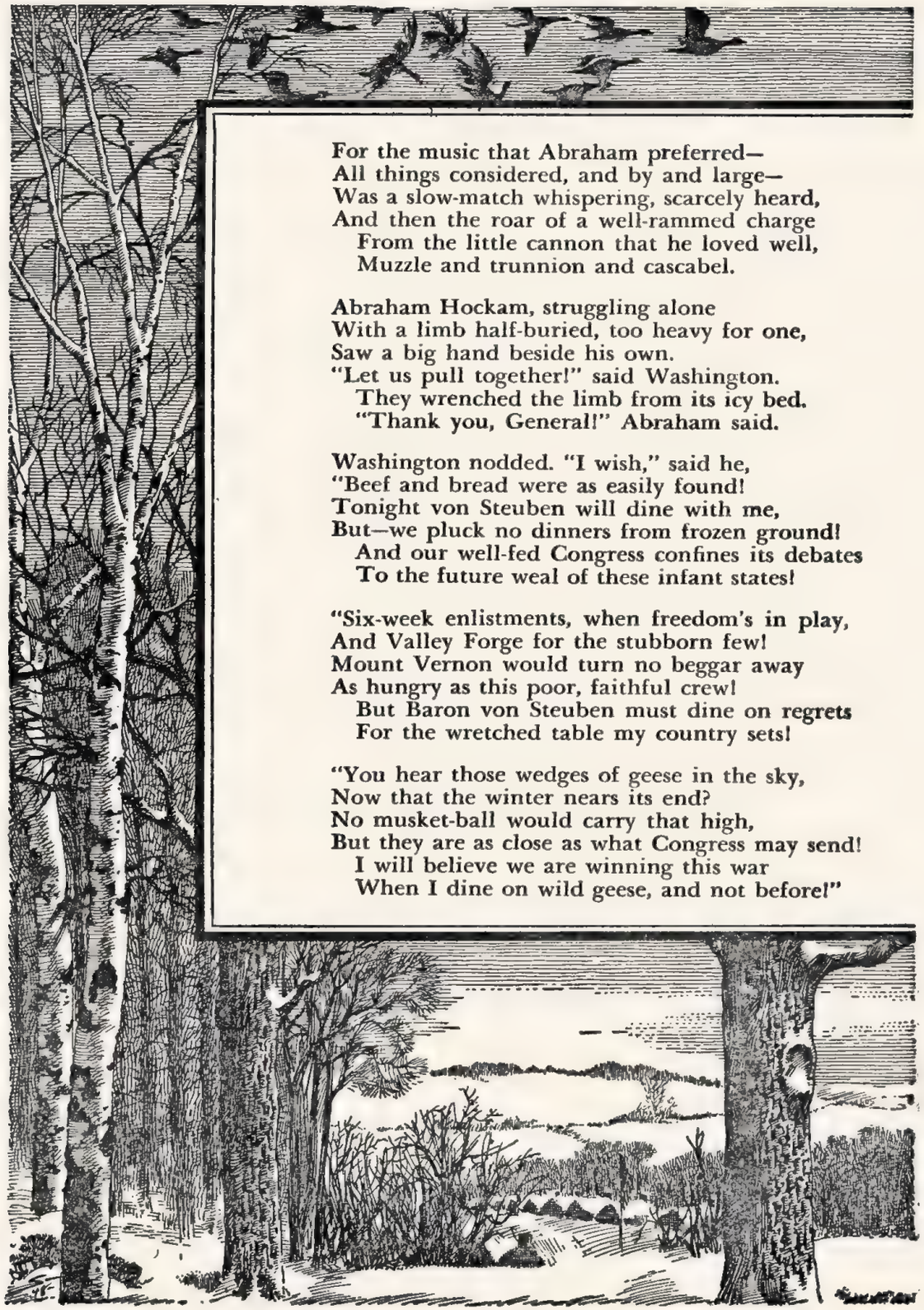
For the music that Abraham preferred—
All things considered, and by and large—
Was a slow-match whispering, scarcely heard,
And then the roar of a well-rammed charge
From the little cannon that he loved well,
Muzzle and trunnion and cascabel.

Abraham Hockam, struggling alone
With a limb half-buried, too heavy for one,
Saw a big hand beside his own.
"Let us pull together!" said Washington.
They wrenched the limb from its icy bed.
"Thank you, General!" Abraham said.

Washington nodded. "I wish," said he,
"Beef and bread were as easily found!
Tonight von Steuben will dine with me,
But—we pluck no dinners from frozen ground!
And our well-fed Congress confines its debates
To the future weal of these infant states!

"Six-week enlistments, when freedom's in play,
And Valley Forge for the stubborn few!
Mount Vernon would turn no beggar away
As hungry as this poor, faithful crew!
But Baron von Steuben must dine on regrets
For the wretched table my country sets!

"You hear those wedges of geese in the sky,
Now that the winter nears its end?
No musket-ball would carry that high,
But they are as close as what Congress may send!
I will believe we are winning this war
When I dine on wild geese, and not before!"



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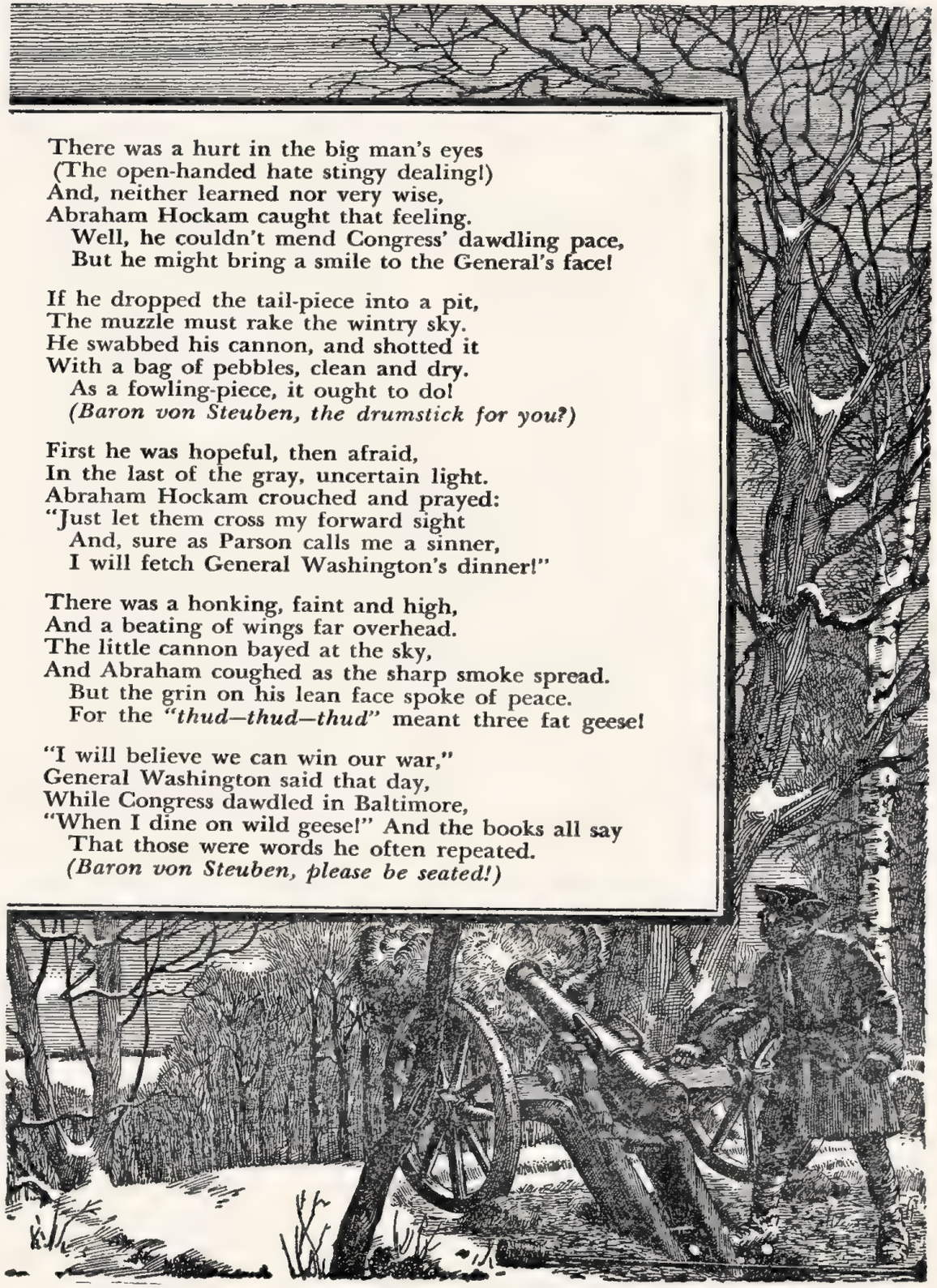

There was a hurt in the big man's eyes
(The open-handed hate stingy dealing!)
And, neither learned nor very wise,
Abraham Hockam caught that feeling.
  Well, he couldn't mend Congress' dawdling pace,
  But he might bring a smile to the General's face!

If he dropped the tail-piece into a pit,
The muzzle must rake the wintry sky.
He swabbed his cannon, and shotted it
With a bag of pebbles, clean and dry.
  As a fowling-piece, it ought to do!
  (Baron von Steuben, the drumstick for you?)

First he was hopeful, then afraid,
In the last of the gray, uncertain light.
Abraham Hockam crouched and prayed:
"Just let them cross my forward sight
  And, sure as Parson calls me a sinner,
  I will fetch General Washington's dinner!"

There was a honking, faint and high,
And a beating of wings far overhead.
The little cannon bayed at the sky,
And Abraham coughed as the sharp smoke spread.
  But the grin on his lean face spoke of peace.
  For the *"thud—thud—thud"* meant three fat geese!

"I will believe we can win our war,"
General Washington said that day,
While Congress dawdled in Baltimore,
"When I dine on wild geese!" And the books all say
  That those were words he often repeated.
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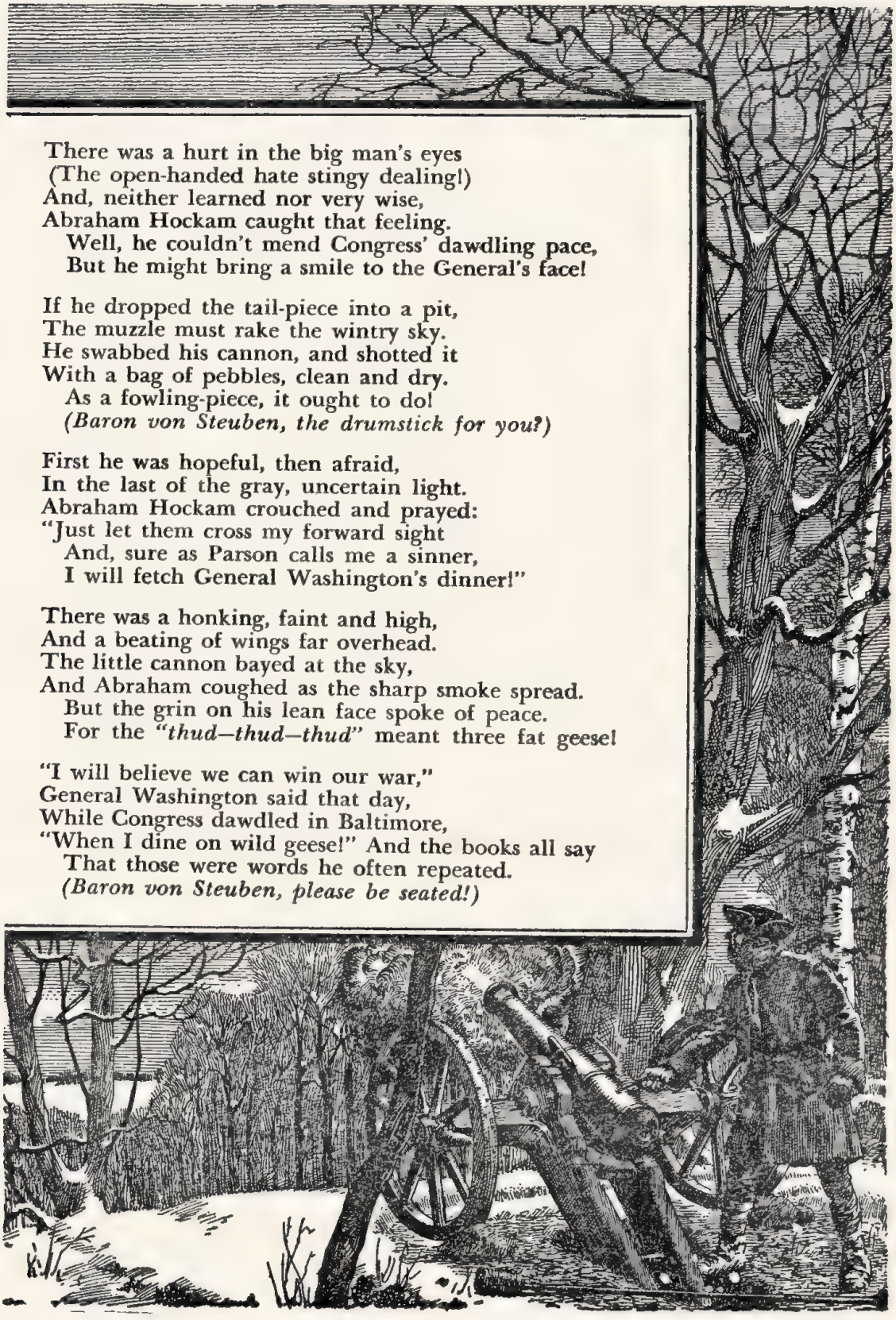

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ON THE BEAM

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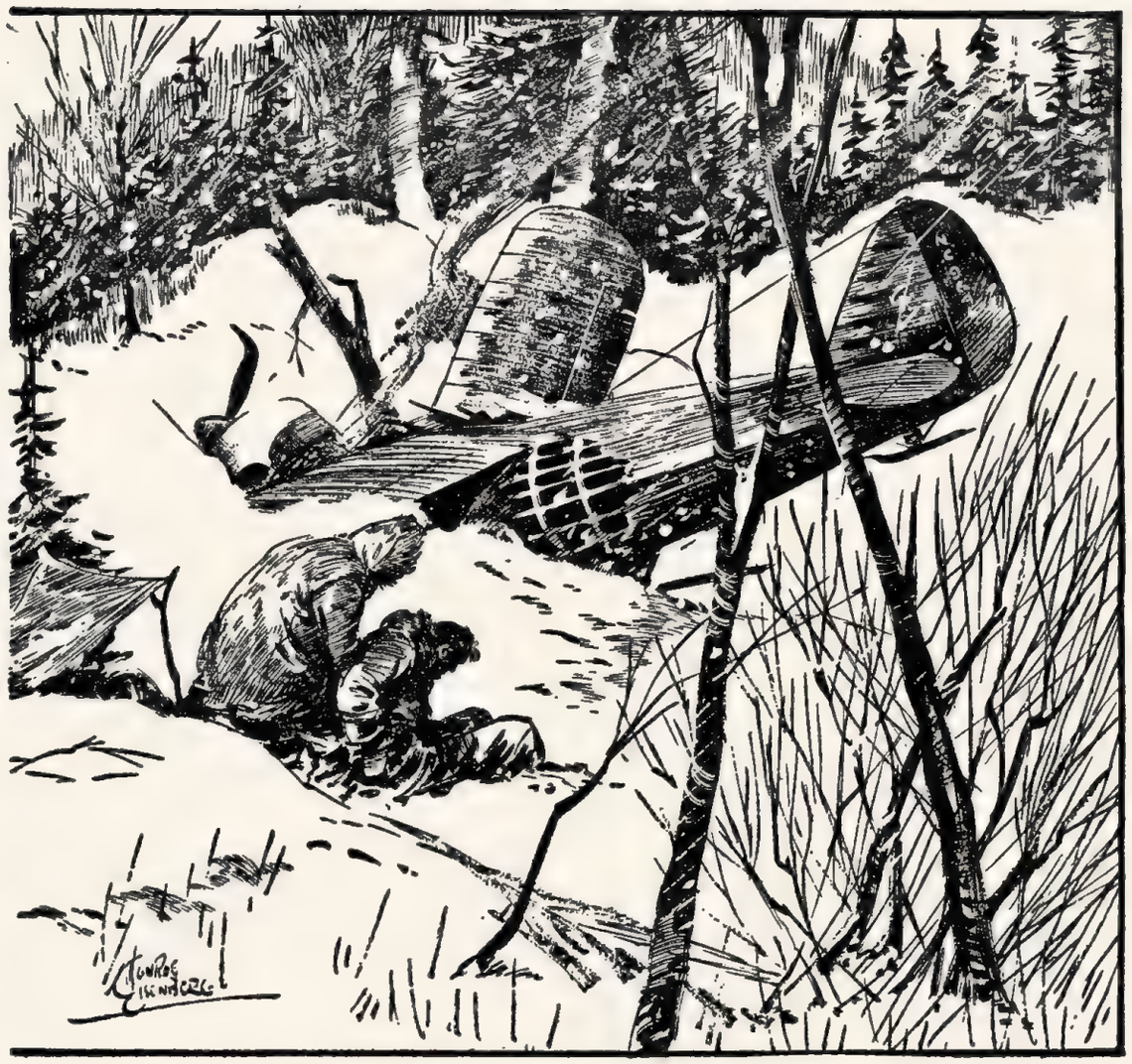

Old Man Sather waited until Kelso was busy, then he got ready to start for Meehan Lake.

OLD MAN SATHER recognized the signs—the sympathetic glances of friends; the shaking of heads when they thought he wasn't looking; the little groups getting together and talking in low tones. He had seen this happen to others who had missed too many boats. "Missed too many boats" was the Alaskan way of saying a man had remained in the country so long that he was mentally unbalanced. There were some ten-dollar words to describe this condition, but sourdoughs either couldn't remember them or didn't bother to use them. A jury was called, the camp doctor gave his testimony, friends also testified, then the jury returned the verdict.

Usually the man was gently informed that he had been working too hard for one of his years and that he should take a rest. His best friends—his very best friends, for whom he would go to hell, give his shirt or his last dollar—lined up with the others. There would be sadness in their eyes, regret in their voices and pain in their hearts, but they would go

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

ILLUSTRATED BY MONROE EISENBERG

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through with it. And what chance had an old man against everyone, including the law? None at all.

If he went peacefully with the marshal it was fine—no handcuffs, no restraint. But if he put up a fight, then they handcuffed him.

Old Man Sather had to admit that the law had all the best of it both from the standpoint of force and plain common sense. After all, if an old man went prospecting when he couldn't take care of himself, it cost the government and his friends lots of time and money trying to find him. He would be better off in the Pioneer Home in Sitka or in some hospital Outside.

But Old Man Sather, whom many called Uncle Dan, wanted to take one more whirl at prospecting. He was sure —as he had been sure on scores of other occasions—there was gold in Keno Creek. "Give me one more shot at prospecting," he told himself and others, "and I'll be willing to admit I'm getting along in years. I'll even admit my mind ain't what it used to be—if it ever was—and that I'm getting childish. But if I don't get my last chance, then it'll bust me all up, and a man who is busted all up, don't last long. Sooner or later he gets a box and is cached away six feet under ground."

SINCE the coming of planes and radios Old Man Sather had observed new words and phrases were describing old conditions. If a man knew what he was doing, he was *on the beam. Off the beam* indicated a man had missed too many boats.

And so, when the marshal and a couple of friends dropped in on him and said, "Come down to the court house with us, Uncle Dan, and talk things over," Old Man Sather knew what was ahead of him. He felt trapped, and there was a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. It was like a doctor telling you that you had an incurable disease. It meant your life was finished except for the long, hard days of waiting for the end. It meant you were nearing the end of the last trail. Old Man Sather's sigh as he reached for his parka almost broke their hearts.

Each man thought, "The old fellow's eyes are bad, he can't spot the landmarks any more, and it's only a question of time until he gets lost or into trouble. We are doing this for his own good."

Old Man Sather blinked a couple of times, when they weren't looking, brushed his eyes with the back of his hand, looked longingly at the familiar objects in his cabin and said, "I guess I'm ready, boys."

It sure was going to be tough next spring, when the ice went out, not to get an outfit together and say to a bush pilot, "There's a little crik runnin' into a lake behind a mountain with the top knocked off. Can you put me down on the lake?" And it was going to be tougher not to fight through the brush to likely bars, to start panning for gold, to cuss the mosquitoes, to sit around the campfire of evenings with good wood smoke in a man's nostrils, listening to the radio. Then there was another thrill denied the old-time miners—a plane spotting your camp smoke, coming in low to drop the mail, a newspaper or two and fresh vegetables.

They thought Old Man Sather was having one of his spells when everything went blank, but he wasn't. He was just standing there thinking of all that he was going to miss. "Mind if I take my radio along? It's brand new. Got little tubes, more power, and ain't so heavy to pack as the old kind. The old kind used to add a lot to a man's load."

They almost broke their necks to tell Old Man Sather he could bring along his radio. It was a battery set, of course, because there are no electric power outlets where a man could plug in Sather's field of endeavor. He added a box of batteries to the few things he was taking, then followed them to the waiting car.

Doc Mullen, Cold Deck's only doctor examined him. Outside, Doc would have been a famous surgeon. But three things kept him in the little mining community —he liked Alaska; he was crazy about the hunting and fishing; and he enjoyed a general practitioner's life. Planes raced the stork to his little hospital; or he made emergency trips with bush pilots to mines and salmon canneries.

He was sorry to see Old Man Sather come in and he made the usual examina-

tion. "Usually luck and a little fast thinking gets me out of jams," the patient said. "But of late, I'm afraid my mind ain't sparkin' like it should, Doc, and folks are beginnin' to talk. Lots of old men far-sighted. They can see things a long ways off . . ."

"That helps in fixing landmarks, Uncle Dan," Doc Mullen said. "Your vision is very good close up, but you can't spot distant landmarks and it has your friends worried."

For a moment Old Man Sather was tempted to explain his method of locating distant objects. In a land heavily mineralized, often magnetized, a compass was not always reliable. And an old man was likely to forget and leave his rifle, axe or other piece of metal near the compass when taking a bearing. He decided against it. "It might prove I'm touched in the head," he thought.

"We'll go over to the court house," Doc Mullen said when he had finished. Doc was glad that winter was hanging on. If the ducks and geese were flying and there was a promise of the breakup in the air, it would be much harder on Old Man Sather. And very much tougher on those who were doing what was deemed best for him.

There was a very friendly atmosphere in the court room. Judge Conway, the United States commissioner smiled. Deputy Marshal Kelso also smiled, then sat twisting his big hands together. He didn't relish the job of taking Old Man Sather to the mental institution.

ALL HIS life the old man had spoken the truth whether it hurt or favored him. "Like Doc Mullen says," he admitted, "sometimes things go blank. I just can't seem to think, so I set down and pretty soon I think just as good as I ever could. I used to get mad and things would go blank. I'm the kind what gets mad inside and sort of gets bottled up. Doc said it was something about blood vessels around the heart tightenin' up so enough blood didn't go to the brain. Well, I quit gettin' mad. No more trouble. Now I figger if you can let me go on one more prospectin' trip . . ."

"We're afraid you'll get lost, Uncle Dan," Conway gently explained. "Now, where you're going you'll take things easy, have good food and shelter at all times."

"A man who has worked all his life don't want to take things easy. He starts rustin' apart," Old Man Sather answered. He was trying not to get mad and have a black-out. "And when it comes to food and shelter what's the matter with a pot of beans and a brush camp? Also now they have these here vity-mans that'll take care of a man if the plane don't drop fresh vegetables and fruit on him."

"You hear voices," Conway explained.

"That's right," he admitted, "but I don't pay them no mind. As I figger it, if a man don't listen, he ain't dangerous."

"You talk to yourself," the commissioner said.

"Who don't? Where you goin' to draw the line between cussin' when somethin' goes wrong, and arguin' with yourself whether there's a false bedrock in Keno Creek which made the '98 miners miss the main gold deposit, or whether it's all been cleaned up? Besides," he concluded with spirit, "when a man's talkin' to hisself he's talkin' to his best friend."

The jury was sympathetic, but the members knew of too many cases in which men of advanced years had gone on "one more prospecting trip" and it had been their last. In view of Old Man Sather's black-outs and poor vision, plus the hearing of voices, there was but one verdict to return.

They turned Old Man Sather over to the deputy marshal, and went about their various duties. Around the stoves and in cabins the word went, "Old Man Sather's off the beam. They're sending him Outside to the asylum. It's the only decent thing to do."

Old Man Sather made himself comfortable in Mike Kelso's home. "It looks like I'm fresh out of luck," he said. "I figgered sure I could scheme a way of stayin' in the country another year, but the cards was again' me this time."

"You'll like it fine Outside," Kelso insisted. "Maybe, with rest, you'll perk up and can go prospecting some other year."

"There ain't no use in me kiddin' myself," Old Man Sather answered. "When you're my age you don't get many second

chances." He was eighty-five, but always lied cheerfully under oath, and knocked off ten years. It was his one untruth. "When do we take off?"

"Thursday. Pete Marshall will fly us to Anchorage and we'll catch a plane south from there. One of the big, four-motored jobs. You've never been on one. They have mighty fetching girls as stewardesses. You'll like it."

"I'd like takin' off in a two-place job for Keno Creek better," the old man retorted.

Thursday morning Old Man Sather took a quick look at the weather. It was snowing, and he hoped Pete Marshall would be grounded, but Anchorage reported the weather clear and cold. When they reached the airport the single motor was warmed up and three passengers were seated in the plane.

Old Man Sather looked around at the few familiar objects not hidden by the swirling snow curtain. "She's a good country. I came fifty years ago with the stampeders. I've no regrets," he said. "Or . . . only one regret. I'd like one more prospectin' trip."

And with that he stepped into the plane. One passenger was an Arctic trader; the other two were salesmen making the rounds of the smaller mining camps.

Kelso closed and locked the door. Old Man Sather, from habit, fixed the seat belt. It was routine with him these days. Pete Marshall yelled over his shoulder, "All set?"

"All set!"

They took off with skis slapping the airport's packed snow, and were in the air with snow pressing in all around. Old Man Sather looked out. He couldn't see a thing, but he knew what it was like under the wings—the nests of fuel drums, the scattered cabins, the cemetery with several open graves. They had been dug against probable use in the winter when the ground was frozen. Some folks shuddered at this, but others claimed it wasn't any different than putting aside a stock of winter grub. There was the river, frozen; the steamers hauled out to protect them from the break-up; and the dog lines near the cabins; and the trails radiating from the camp.

"Hell," Old Man Sather thought, "right now in Flapjack Meehan's restaurant they're talkin' about prospectin' this season. And under our wings are miners mushin' in outfits."

He dozed and muttered, "Damn it, Sather. As a miner you know they quit when they struck false bedrock on Keno Creek."

"Yeah, I know it, Sather," he answered, "but you should've thought of that years ago. The first thing you know they'll be sayin' you missed too many boats and pack you off to the bughouse."

"Sather, this year, I'm going to Keno Creek, for sure."

"Damned right you are," he agreed with himself.

The others exchanged knowing glances. "A lot of 'em are like that," Pete Marshall commented. "But . . . I hate to see Uncle Dan talking to himself."

FRED RAND, tractor salesman, first noticed the motor was heating. He tapped Marshall and pointed. The pilot nodded. "She's been running from normal to too hot and back again for a half hour. We may have to set her down."

Rand never batted an eye. His fellow salesman—general merchandise—shrugged his shoulders. Kelso yawned and stretched to rid himself of the tension following the discovery of the hot motor. He looked at Old Man Sather and said, "Let him sleep."

Old Man Sather awakened with a start. "Somethin' wrong with the motor," he declared. "Don't sound right."

The plane was bucking violently as it was caught in air eddies. Pete Marshall's face betrayed nothing but determination. He knew his approximate location. Two CAA stations had gotten cross bearings on him. It didn't look promising. It didn't look at all promising. Peaks, glaciers, wind-swept gorges, rolling hills covered with stunted trees and tundra. Rivers that were frozen solid to gravel and looked like paved highways from the air. Cabins were few and far between, and either empty or occupied by trappers.

Old Man Sather felt sorry for the others. They were young and had so much unfinished business. He was old, and but a single item of unfinished busi-

ness remained—Keno Creek. He wondered if there would be time for fear. You'd see the cliff dead ahead, then you'd hit. A few seconds at most. If you skimmed the tree tops, then the suspense would be greater. For as much as a minute you'd wonder if there'd be a cleared spot to set the plane down. Or the wings would shear off, and there might be several seconds before the hurtling fuselage shattered against a tree.

Pete Marshall, Old Man Sather knew from experience, was looking for a lake. The motor quit and there was only the whistle of air against the plane. No man spoke. Each man instinctively tightened his belt and stared intently ahead.

Snow flakes. Nothing but snow flakes, leaping at them and vanishing. Visibility was hardly a hundred feet.

The altimeter registered almost zero. Old Man Sather braced himself, then suddenly he saw a tree eating through the wing, and he was jerked violently about. Next his spine was jolted violently against the seat. The seat belt cut into his legs as his body tried to go through the roof. He was knocked from side to side, then there was a jolting crash and a horrible silence. A man began moaning. Another collapsed as if his bones had suddenly turned to putty. The pilot was slumped in his seat, blood pouring from a head gash. Old Man Sather thought, "Three, four folks need a lot of doctorin' right now." Then he heard the crackle of flames.

Kelso shook his head as boxer rids himself of the fog following a hard punch. "The door, Uncle Dan," he said thickly.

Old Man Sather had already released his seat belt and was working on Kelso's. Now he tried to open the door. It was jammed. He threw his frail shoulders against it without effect. Kelso crawled over, put his shoulders against the door, braced his feet and heaved. The door flew open and he landed in the snow on his shoulders. Old Man Sather released the other seat belts and said, "You drag 'em out, Kelso, I ain't got the stren'th. They're heavy men." He began throwing the sleeping bag, rifle, axe and emergency

NOW the girls ask BOB for dates
WE JUST COOKED UP A SURPRISE PARTY FOR PEG TONIGHT! BOB, CAN YOU TAKE ME?
SURE, GIVE ME A SEC TO GET READY!
WISH JOAN ASKED ME, BOB. YOU ALWAYS WERE LUCKY.
WHY DON'T YOU CHANGE YOUR LUCK THE WAY I DID?
I ALWAYS USE LIFEBUOY—THE ONLY SOAP ESPECIALLY MADE TO STOP B.O.—CONTAINS AN EXCLUSIVE PURIFYING INGREDIENT. LIFEBUOY EVERY DAY SURE KEEPS B.O. AWAY!
THIS SURPRISE PARTY WAS FUN, BOB—THANKS FOR TAKING ME.
THANKS FOR ASKING ME, JOAN...
AND THANKS TO LIFEBUOY!
MY DAILY LIFEBUOY BATH IS THE ONE BEST WAY TO GET LASTING ALL-OVER PROTECTION AGAINST B.O. USE LIFEBUOY FOR A WEEK AND YOU'LL USE IT FOR LIFE!
Used in the homes of 40 million Americans
LIFEBUOY HEALTH SOAP
ANOTHER FINE LEVER PRODUCT

supplies into the snow. He carried his radio to a safe spot and by that time Kelso was dragging the men out.

"Let's move the men to a safer spot," Kelso said. "It's getting pretty hot, and a fuel tank might explode and throw burning gasoline over everything."

Fred Rand, the tractor salesman, was in a bad way with a broken leg and possible internal injuries. The pilot was half conscious and Kelso thought he might have a skull fracture. "That general merchandise drummer seems in good shape," Old Man Sather said. "Are you all right?" Kelso nodded. "I'm fit as a fiddle," the old man said. "I ain't as heavy as you boys, so wasn't throwed around as much. Any idear where we are?"

"In the Meehan Lake country," Kelso answered. "A man can wander in circles in these parts and not half try. I hope the weather clears so we can see where we are."

"A compass ain't much good," Old Man Sather said. "I prospected in these parts once. Lots of mineralized areas with magnetic iron. But I don't recognize anything 'round here."

They gave the injured men first aid and set up a shelter. Flame reduced the plane to twisted metal and for awhile the heat was ample, then Kelso built a fire from wood which Old Man Sather rustled. He tuned in his radio briefly and got a weather report. "Big storm movin' in from the Gulf of Alaska tomorrow," he said. "Looks like one of us had better see if he can't find a cabin."

"Hell, no one is in shape to mush except me, and I'm needed here to take care of these injured people," the marshal answered.

"That's right, but what's the matter with me? I can find my way around." Old Man Sather declared.

"That's out of the question," Kelso answered. "We'll have to wait it out."

"This is no place to wait out," the old man argued. "Pete, where's Meehan Lake?"

"We were near the north end of the lake," the pilot answered slowly, striving to collect his thoughts. "They got a fix on me as the motor was quitting. We crashed about five minutes later. Reception was poor, and I don't know whether I got across the truth. Jeez, I feel lousy. I feel . . ." He fell over on his side in the snow.

OLD MAN SATHER waited until Kelso was busy with Marshall then he stuffed emergency food into his pocket, took a hand axe, slung his radio over his shoulder and headed in the general direction of Meehan Lake.

Kelso missed him a few minutes later. He shouted several times, then made a quick circle of the camp. Snow had already blown over the old man's tracks. The merchandise salesman was sick at the stomach when he returned. There was a trace of crimson on the snow when he finished heaving. "How do you feel, Sam?" Kelso asked.

"O.K.," he lied. "I'm in better shape than Marshall and Rand. What about Uncle Dan?"

"The old fool took off. I tried to find him, but I couldn't leave you fellows for him," Kelso replied. "He has some fool bee in his bonnet about finding Meehan Lake."

"Hasn't a chance in the world," the pilot said thickly. "No landmarks—just rolling tundra. One ridge looks like the others. Well, maybe it's better to die, trying to help injured people, than to live in a bughouse the remainder of your days. Where's his radio? Let's find out if they know we're down."

"The old fool took it with him," Kelso answered. "Extra weight, too. Well, he didn't pack it for the music, because, if he'd have thought a moment he would have realized what it would mean to us. The damned thing is always with him. He slung it over his shoulder, like as not, with no more thought than putting on his parka." He shrugged his shoulders. "That's the way in this country. Things can go on like this for weeks, then . . . get worse."

Kelso was in for a tough night and knew it. If Marshall's head injury was serious he might became delirious and wander off. There would be no finding him in the blizzard which was growing in strength.

He kept the coffee pot going for himself and drank it black and strong. For the others he prepared soup and canned

food. They seemed satisfied with the soup. Fred Rand was in constant pain. And often he thought of Old Man Sather. "I hope when it comes, it comes quick to him," he said many times during the night.

Marshall felt better the next morning. "Get into my sleeping bag, Kelso," he urged. "The biggest, toughest guy can't go indefinitely without rest. We're going to lean on you a lot before this is over."

"I suppose you're right," Kelso answered. "Call me if needed. Keep the fire going. It'll be hell starting another."

It was late afternoon and Marshall was dozing. He awakened with a start. "Getting as bad as Uncle Dan. Hearing voices," he muttered.

He listened in spite of himself and heard a weak, "Hey! Hey!"

"Hey!" Marshall yelled and Kelso sat up, startled.

"Hey!" The answer came through the swirling flakes. There was a constant moaning of wind through the stunted trees on a ridge which partly broke its force. "Hey!"

Kelso yelled. "Stay where you are! I'll come and get you, Uncle Dan!" He turned to Marshall as he squirmed from the bag. "The poor old bastard has been wandering around all night. I don't see how he survived. They sure made 'em tough when he was born."

"Hey!"

"Coming!" Kelso bellowed.

Old Man Sather, gray with exhaustion, came out of the storm. "Just about tuckered out," he said. "Gimme some coffee, please." He drank it as he sat near the fire. "Sure hits the spot."

"It's a wonder you didn't freeze to death," Kelso said.

"Kept movin' until the broadcastin' station quit for the night," Old Man Sather answered. "Then siwashed it. Built a little fire put my back again' a tree and sorta dozed. When the radio come on again I kept goin'. I was slowed down a lot blazin' trees and brush. I got to the lake, worked along until I found a cabin. I'll have to have some help draggin' the sled up the hill." He nodded in the direction of the lake.

"The sled?"

"Yeah, found a sled in the cabin. It ain't much, but it'll do. Figgered we couldn't pack in a man with a busted leg," the old man answered.

"The cabin?"

"Yeah. Flapjack Meehan's old cabin. The lake was named after him, you know," Old Man Sather explained. He was limping along, cocking his ear, and finally he heard music. "Weddin' march," he said. "Radio is over there on the sled."

"Wedding march?" Kelso asked.

"Sure. It's part of a program. I like to hear it—makes me think of my younger days. Well, here's the sled. I necked it all the way," he said.

"Let's sit down and have a smoke," Kelso suggested. He could see that the old man was going on sheer nerve. After Sather's pipe was going and Kelso's cigarette was drawing nicely, the deputy marshal said, "I'm damned if understand how you found the lake in a howling blizzard and no compass . . ."

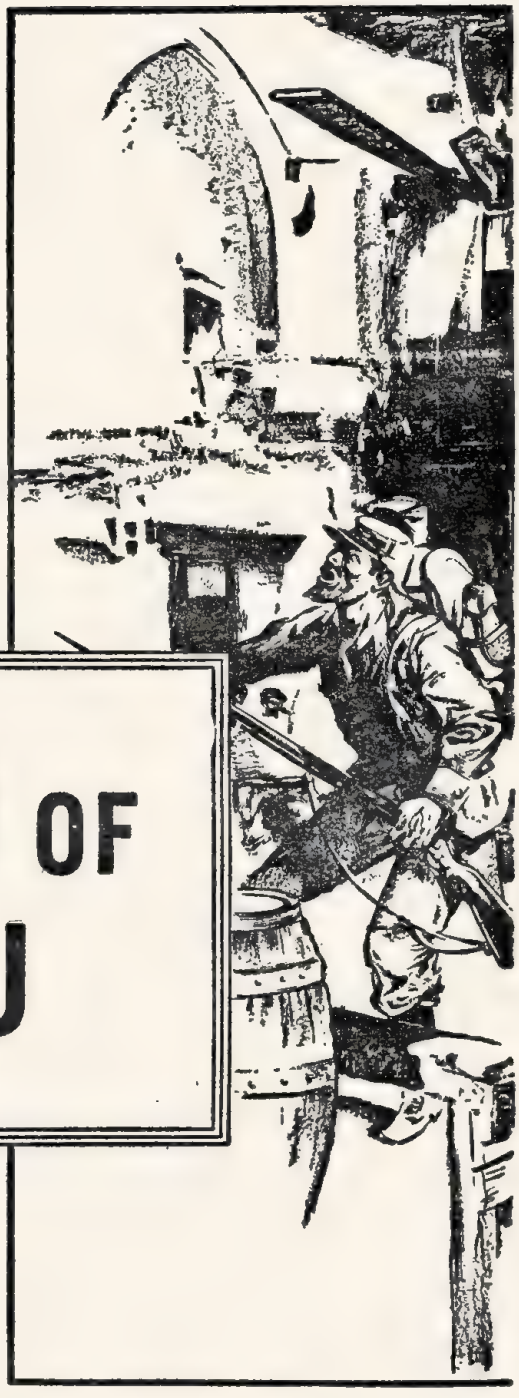
"Like I told you, you can't depend on a compass in these parts," Old Man Sather explained. "When my eyes couldn't pick up landmarks a long way off, I began usin' my radio. Found it out in a funny kind of way. I'd set the thing down on the table and the station would come in weak. But if I turned the radio this way or that, it would get stronger or weaker. I finally figgered out which way the broadcastin' station lay from my radio. I made compass marks on the case showin' north, south, east and west. After that blizzards or night or nothin' else, except my legs playin' out could stop me. Just turn on the music and mush. As soon as Marshall told me the direction of the lake, I tuned in my radio and snuk away."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Kelso asked curiously.

"And have you think I was clean off the beam?" Old Man Sather indignantly demanded. "I've missed too many boats, but I ain't *that* crazy."

"Off the beam . . . you?" Kelso said, getting up and grasping the sled rope.

"No, you're right on the beam. We're going back to Cold Deck when all this mess is cleaned up. We're going to clean up a mess there, too. As long as you have your radio I guess you won't get lost. And if you need a little grubstake to get you to Keno Creek—well, just let me know."



THE HAND OF DANJOU

By
ROBERT CARSE

THERE was a surf-like roar now in the firing. It never stopped. The new carbines of the Legion had a flat-slapping crack sharper than the reports of the officers' revolvers, and the muskets the Mexicans used pounded with a rough, protracted concussion. Waldemar Karig sat against the far wall hunched low in the blue-gray waver of powder smoke and told himself once more that he didn't like it.

If you live, Waldemar, you'll remember the date and the place a long time. You're as drunk as a herd of goats. You've got a crease from a Juarista musket slug along your shoulder. But still

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As the Legionnaires made a bayonet rush across the patio, a cross enfilade met them.

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If you live, Waldemar, you'll remember the date and the place a long time. You're as drunk as a herd of goats. You've got a crease from a Juarista musket slug along your shoulder. But still you know that you're in a village called Camerone. It's somewhere up the *Camino Real* from Vera Cruz in Mexico. The date is the thirtieth of April, 1863, and you're much too old to be here. You should have retired the last time your enlistment was out.

His big, splay fingers reached for the

ILLUSTRATED BY ROGER L. THOMAS

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canteen at his side and in sorrow he drank from it. The *pulque* was green, very foul, and he shuddered. Nobody had seen him take the drink, though; for that he was glad. The stuff would go fast among them in the room.

He shoved up a bit higher against the adobe wall and watched the others. They stood erect, shoulder to shoulder, to meet the Mexicans. The Mexicans rushed mounted and on foot. A screaming young officer in a silver-spangled jacket once flung himself headlong from his horse nearly into the room. Machete blows racked upon bayonets. There were repeated visions of dark faces and eyes wild with the anguish of death. They went from sight with the speed of a dream and only the Legionnaires were there in the early morning sunlight of the window squares. Wounded were eased down. Ramrods were run through carbine barrels, cartridges brought from rear belt boxes to front. Men shifted from foot to foot, quietly waiting.

It was much the same at the opposite end of the room. The plank doors and the breach ripped through the far wall were defended by unbroken groups. A man killed or wounded was instantly replaced. Even the wounded were calm, tended to themselves.

Waldemar had the idea that in the smoke obscurity the figures of the Legionnaires took heroic size. You're just an old drunk, he told himself. The mule, Suzy, is your only friend, and the best you can do is care for her and the rest of her kind. But you're proud of these men and the way they fight. Look at Danjou.

CAPTAIN DANJOU stood in the middle of the room to direct the defense. He was a slender and pale man, almost foppish-seeming in his long tunic and trousers that bagged widely above his varnished boots. He wore his kepi cocked on the side of his skull and so far the fighting hadn't disarranged his pointed collar or soiled his white kid gloves. The cross of the Legion of Honour glinted on his chest, and from time to time, with an habitual gesture, he raised his right hand to give emphasis to an order.

The captain can't forget that right hand, Waldemar thought. He lost the real one with us there before Sevastopol in the old days. What he's got is a wooden one to replace it. So he waves the false hand around; he'd like to make believe it was real. But you've known many soldiers, and he's just about the best. You can trust him and all he does.

Outside and in the patio behind the Mexican firing abruptly stopped. The Legion for the first time could hear the moans of their wounded, the bubbling of blood from the lungs of a man with a chest wound, the slow, soft little cries of one about to die. Waldemar straightened; mules brayed in the distance, and he recognized the sound of Suzy and the rest of his charges. You should either be with them, he decided, or do some fighting here. Your wound is no longer an excuse for you to sit still.

But Captain Danjou had gone forward to one of the windows. He sent back the men who defended it, stood alone. A strong, confident voice called in at him, *"Oiga, el Capitan de Tercio!"* Danjou turned. He motioned to the sub-lieutenants, Maudet and Vilain, then to bow-legged Bartolotte, the Spaniard. "They seem to want to treat with us," he said. "What is it the man calls, Legionnaire?"

Bartolotte's face gathered in a tight frown under the sweep of his kepi visor. "Surrender or get wiped out, *mon Capitaine.*"

"Tell him the Legion doesn't surrender."

Bartolotte must have said more than that, for a fierce chorus of yells caught over the last of his words and musket balls hacked into the room in a heavy fusillade. Maudet and Vilain were starting back to their own places, but Danjou halted them.

"We were warned before we left Chiquihite," Danjou said. "We're up against a force of almost four thousand. It may go very badly for us here. So I'm asking all of you to swear to me that you won't surrender."

"But certainly, Captain," Vilain said, and to him Danjou held out the stiff right hand. Maudet took it, turned, and one by one the men came up and swore the oath. Waldemar was last. Emotion rose high in his throat, made him very

hoarse as he pronounced the words. Danjou was keenly staring at him. "You're about ready to get back into the fight, aren't you, oldtimer?" Danjou asked.

"My shoulder's been bothering me," Waldemar mumbled. "But I'm in shape again to give them a few, *mon Capitaine.*"

"Good," Danjou said, and smiled. "You're a man who knows how."

Waldemar had gone across the room to pick up his carbine, take a quick pull on the *pulque.* His back was turned when Danjou was hit. Yet somehow he sensed it and turned around. The ball had struck the captain in the upper body. Dark arterial blood spurted over the broad blue waistcloth and the flopping trousers. It was a death blow, Waldemar knew, and sprang to the captain. But Danjou was down, supine. The thin-featured face closed in the final rigor; life left the eyes and the body was still.

Waldemar waited for Lieutenant Vilain to cover the face, arrange the clothing over the great, ragged hole of the wound. Then he went to a window, tapped one of the men there on the shoulder. "Move over," he shouted through the crash of the firing. "I've got a bill I want to pay."

He was told later in a lull between charges that it was at half-past nine the captain was killed. But time meant nothing to him, or the fact that all around him death constantly pressed. He was filled by a fury of hatred aroused by Danjou's loss. Across his memory in often surprisingly clear passage went memories of his years of service with the captain.

He recalled Presqu'Ile at Gallipoli when the Legion had landed from the transports at the start of the Crimean campaign. Danjou had been his platoon officer then, found a place for him in the boat, helped him down from the ladder, taken his pack. In the action at Alma he had gone in right behind Danjou, scrambling, running, yelling, shooting and always ahead of him was the slender, immaculate figure. At the siege of Sevastopol even Danjou had lost his foppishness. Like the rest, he draped blankets around his shoulders against the cold,

Waldemar Karig

wore leather gaiters instead of his fancy boots. But Waldemar had shown him a couple of peasant tricks about keeping warm.

"Stuff my old man taught me when I was a kid in Strasbourg," Waldemar said. "First, wooden shoes. No snow, no slush is going to come through those. Here, I've made you a pair. And pack them with straw and change the straw every day. If it gets wet it rots, and so do your feet."

Danjou had grinned back at him in answer, disappeared down the trench to return with a flask of Turkish plum brandy. "To us," Danjou said as they drank. "To us and to the Legion."

But after that Danjou had got the wound that cost him his hand. Then it had been back to Africa and the mountain fighting against the Kabyle tribesmen. Out of Africa at Napoleon's own order and they marched the Lombardy plains in the high-fluttering dust of the white roads that led to the Austrians. The battles there were Magenta and Solferino, and at Solferino it had been

a bitter business, house-to-house and from wall to wall. He'd followed Danjou again, close up behind the tails of the long tunic, shouting the old Legion yells and cursing himself and the others forward.

VICTORY had come, of course, and the big parade of celebration in Paris, Danjou out in front of the company sporting the crimson ribbon and white lacquer cross of the Legion of Honour. You were happy for him and proud of yourself; still, in the rear of your head, was the idea that it couldn't go on forever. You were in the Legion because you had no other home. Go back to Strasbourg and you wouldn't last six weeks on the old man's little tenant farm. Picking hops and working the land from dawn until late after dark wasn't a way to live when almost half of what you made went to the nobleman who owned the land. You had your own kind in the Legion, most of them former peasant lads like yourself, and always in battle and out you could find a drink.

Danjou had talked to him about his drinking, asked him to cut down on it. But he never missed a formation; he was there every time the captain wanted him, and in the last couple of years the assignment as company muleteer had made the work a lot easier for him.

The carbine had become so hot that in reloading Waldemar scorched his hand, shocked himself back into reality. Mexican dead made a weird and terrible parapet before the window where he stood. Out in the open *zopilotes* flapped over the corpses of men and horses, and flies were everywhere. His front cartridge box was empty. The numbness of his shoulder and side told him how steadily he had been firing, and in surprise he looked around at Bartolotte.

Bartolotte had the appearance of being prepared for some children's prank. Powder had blackened his face until only his eye sockets showed clear. A clay pipe packed with scaflerati shag was in his mouth, tilted at an angle, and around his head was a gaudy bandana handkerchief he had taken from some *cantina* girl in Vera Cruz.

"You're a lot better with a carbine," Bartolotte croaked at him, "than you are with that string of mules. You should have been serving as a *voltigeur* all along. But the Mexicans have got your mules. Only your sweetheart, Suzy, broke loose a while ago. She streaked across right in front of here. Didn't you see her?"

"Maybe I did," Waldemar said. "But I've been busy paying off for the captain, and I'm kind of confused in my head. I got to thinking of old days. Things haven't been very straight."

"If it was just you alone," Bartolotte said, "I'd put it down to the *pulque* you got in the canteen. But others have been off their heads. Back around noon they heard drums and fifes. They thought it was the Regiment, come to haul us out. Instead, it was a lot more of the Juarista infantry. That's why the firing has slacked off; they're getting ready for a big new charge."

Waldemar restrained himself from looking back into the room. He searched the cactus-studded plain for sight of Suzy and the other mules. But there were only Mexicans on their stocky cayuses, the loose ranks of infantry in cotton pants and sombreros. He counted and cursed. "Not good," he told Bartolotte.

"Not good at all," Bartolotte said. He nudged Waldemar's arm. "Take a look inside. Vilain has got his and so have many of the rest. Each charge, they knock off more of us, and we only started out with sixty-two men and three officers."

Waldemar slowly turned, and it was if he stared into a concentrate of all his worst battle memories. The wounded and dead lay in rows, or hunched where they had fallen. Powder smoke was low along the floor; it stung the eyes and nose, gagged the throat. Above it, lighter, soft pearl in color, drifted the smoke from the burning thatch of the roof. Legionnaires had defended the loft to save the roof from being set afire, but obviously they were all dead. Bits of burning straw, of flaming wood glanced down upon the bodies of the men below. Those who had the strength pushed the fragments away; the rest lay still, muttering for water, water.

"We got none," Bartolotte said. "Every *bidon* in the place is empty except for that slop of yours. Most of the guys are a bit crazy. They've been trying to drink their own blood, their own urine."

"They can have the *pulque,*" Waldemar said.

"If it was any good for a wounded man," Bartolotte said, "I would have taken it from you a time back. We're just stuck, that's all."

"But we can't surrender," Waldemar said. "We swore holding the hand of Danjou that we wouldn't."

"Don't worry," Bartolotte said. He tapped out his pipe, slid it into his tunic. "We won't have a chance. Here's the Mexicans."

THE CAVALRY started the charge. They came at the lope and then the canter and full gallop. Waldemar could see the bent bodies of the riders, the broad stirrup hoods, the slant of afternoon sunlight on machete and saber blades, bits and silver-mounted bridles. He had brought all of his remaining cartridges into his front belt box, braced ready to shoot. But Lieutenant Maudet called from behind, "Hold your fire until sixty paces. Then shoot low, for the horses."

It did something to Waldemar to see the horses go down. He had been a muleteer too long, he thought strangely; his affection for four-legged animals was too great. He wondered for an instant if Suzy were still alive, if he would see her again. Then Mexicans, men who ran on foot and shot from the hip, were right before him.

He used the narrow Legion bayonet, the stock and butt of the carbine. He killed to save himself, in a desperation where no thought was clear and action itself was subconscious. He fell, rose, was knocked back, rose again and found the window open to the dusk.

But some of the Mexicans had stayed close under the walls of the house. They had brought piles of faggots with them and those were already alight. The splintered and cracked planks of the doors were touched by flame. A jagged cast of carmine light was through the room, and Maudet called an order.

It was Corporal Berg, the last of his squad, who responded first, and after him Corporal Maine, and Katau, Wenzel, Constantin and Leonhart. They made a bayonet rush to free the door and the patio beyond.

A cross enfilade met them. They went reeling and sprawling down and past them in the lurid light sprang Mexicans. Their tight trousers and big hats made them look ludicrous in Waldemar's feverish thought, but they came to kill, he knew. He strode over the bodies of the Legion towards them with the carbine clubbed.

He didn't see the man who struck him. There was just the blow, the machete blade screeching off the carbine trigger guard and then against his skull. The thick patent leather of his kepi visor took part of the force, and yet he went backward, supine, blinded at once by the shock.

This was the end; even in the pain and blindness he could sense it. He heard Maudet yell, and Cotteau. Cotteau said, "No, Lieutenant, no! They'll kill you!" His words were smashed away by a volley. Stillness came afterwards, broken by a few shots, the slurred thud of steel against flesh, but then it was only the wounded and the sounds of the burning house.

Waldemar swiped the blood from his face and slowly his sight returned. You have to get out of here, he forced himself to think. Find your musette bag. There's ammunition in it and the map Danjou let you copy, and you'll need both. Then find the captain. Take his wooden hand on which we all swore; take his *Légion d'Honneur.* These Juaristas will just dump him in a hole in the ground without a look. Hurry, stupid. You'll fry if you stay in here . . .

He scrambled with an old soldier's skill to where he had left the musette bag and back unerringly to where Danjou lay. He stripped off the glove, loosened the straps that held the artificial hand in place. But as he started to unpin the medal Mexicans came to the doorways and fired at everything that moved within.

Waldemar was already flat, stayed so until they were gone. But there was no more time; the loft beams were buckling

and falling. He put his hand into his side tunic pocket, muttered, *"Au revoir, mon Capitaine,"* and crawled for the window.

No Mexicans were near it. They were all busy with the prisoners. He slid over the sill and belly-down out into the darkness. The Mexican dead kept him from sight for perhaps a hundred yards and then he took shelter behind a giant yucca plant. You're lucky, Waldemar, he thought. You're among the very few to get away.

He glanced back at the house. The widening flare of flame showed him the Legion wounded and prisoners. Lieutenant Maudet lay on a stretcher, but his face, his body were convulsed by pain. It won't be long for him, Waldemar thought, or for those beside him. They're so bad off they're sure to die. But the tough little corporal, Berg, isn't there, and neither is that other *cabo,* Maine. That's good; it means they got away, because they weren't in the room at the end. About twenty of us survived, and now, friend, get going before some Mexican spots you and puts your name on the dead list.

CHAPTER II

VAYA CON DIOS

HE BELIEVED for a while as he worked his way from the farmhouse that he might meet some of the other escaped Legionnaires. He came upon nobody, though, despite the fact he kept close to the *Camino Real.* The stars sent brilliance across the sky, made of the plain a faintly shimmering lake of light where the aloe plants, the cactus and yucca reared enormous in shadow. A profound melancholy whose elements were battle shock and knowledge of the loss of his comrades came over him. When he disturbed an owl among the mesquite and it hooted at him, he jumped and shouted back angry curses.

Suzy must have heard that, for in another minute or so the tall, nimble-footed mule came trotting up the road. Waldemar stood out in the middle of the way to greet her. He put his arms around her neck, patted the softness of the ears, the rounded withers. Suzy was unharmed. She had missed being hurt in the skirmishes before the battle and the battle itself, and for that he was very grateful. He needed Suzy. She meant for him a great deal that was gone and could never return.

He ran his hands over the equipment she carried; his pack roll was still in place, so were his spare canteen and the beautifully worked goatskin sack he had taken from a Kabyle chieftain in the African fighting. Inside the sack he had food and a Colt revolver carefully wrapped in a clean cloth. He had played at dice for the Colt with a Confederate Navy deserter in Vera Cruz, won it and fifty rounds of ammunition. It was a most modern type of weapon, the new Navy model, and he drew it out, slipped it in his belt. "You're doing better, Waldemar," he said aloud, and took a short drag on the canteen that contained the *pulque.*

The drink lifted his spirit, yet he knew that he was far from being safe. He was somewhere between Chiquihite and Palo Verde, and the next town up the road was Huatrisco. But it was quite certain that the Mexicans had patrols out between the towns and he was in no shape for further fighting.

He climbed up on Suzy, closed his knees against her ribs and wheeled her off into the shadow of a shallow arroyo beside the road. There he studied the rough map he had copied days ago from Captain Danjou's at headquarters. Your best bet is to keep west towards Palo Verde, he decided. Our garrison must still be there; we were bound for it with the convoys last night when we left Chiquihite. So head that way. Keep off the road and watch yourself. And remember you haven't only yourself to worry about. You have Suzy, and a whole lot more, you have the hand of Danjou. It's something sacred, his hand. It should be kept safe . . .

Suzy moved without sound, seeming to understand the proximity of danger. Waldemar checked the map from time to time, and watched the stars, but inincreasingly he put his confidence in Suzy. Exhaustion set in upon him; his gaunt head lowered forward on his chest and his body went lax in the saddle. He

half slept, dreaming that he was back in Strasbourg and that it was harvest festival time and the prettiest of the village girls danced with him.

Suzy's quick, light whinny warned him. He straightened, boot soles down hard against the stirrup irons, the Colt up in his hand. "Come out," he said in French, then in Spanish. "Come out! I see you."

It was a boy of fourteen. He wore a sagging straw sombrero and cotton pants, and although there was a sack that might carry musket balls and powder slung from his shoulder, he bore no weapon. One hand grasped the stick that supported him and the other was high in a sign of surrender. "Don't shoot," he said in Spanish that was thick with an Indian accent.

Waldemar brought Suzy along the road to him. He stared down into the boy's face. "Who are you?"

"Pablo Chubic."

"Where are you from?"

"Up there." A thin shoulder lifted under the torn shirt. "The mountains."

"How did you break your leg?"

The boy glanced at the point of bone thrusting through the blood-stained cloth, then back up at Waldemar. "In the fighting this morning."

"You mean you're a Juarista."

"I—" the boy breathed harshly as he tried to find the right words —"I was taken from my village to fight with the Colonel Milan."

"Milan was in command of the outfit that attacked mine. What are you doing here?"

The boy blinked, but the tears came down anyhow, rolling brightly along his cheeks in the starshine. "A horse fell on my leg in the first charge at that house. Nobody would help me. They were all in the fighting, or helping those with worse wounds. So I came away."

"You deserted," Waldemar said. He was dismounting from Suzy. "If *el Coronel* Milan catches you, you'll be shot." The tone of his voice changed, softened. "Sit down. Pull up your pants. I'll fix your leg."

He made a splint with two straight pieces of wood, snapped the bone easily back into place. "You work like a *med-*

With one hand the boy grasped the stick that supported him—the other was high in a sign of surrender.

ico," the boy said, gasping a bit with the pain.

"Shut up," Waldemar said. "I've been in hospital too often not to know this." He cut strips from the pants bottom, securely bound the splint. "Now you'll be able to walk straight again. But before you do, you and I are going for a ride."

"To my village?"

"Si, si, your village," Waldemar said with impatience. "Take a look at this map. Can you find your way to it?"

"Without the map, even," the boy said. He smiled. "It is far in the mountains and there they have no fighting."

"I'd like some of that," Waldemar said. "I've spent more years fighting than you have living." He opened the sack on the saddle, brought out cheese, black bread and sausage. "Go ahead, have some. We'll need it before we're up in the mountains."

"Muchas gracias," the boy said and grasped eagerly for the food. But when Waldemar pulled the stopper from the *pulque* canteen and the other smelled the stuff, he flinched back. "You have very bad stuff," he told Waldemar, "if you don't mind my saying so. In my village, they make much better."

Waldemar took a long and thoughtful drink. "I may stay in your village quite a while, Pablo," he said.

WALDEMAR and the boy became close friends as they rode up into the mountains, Suzy bearing them both. It was a time of almost complete relaxation for Waldemar in which he recouped from his wounds and got his nerves back into shape. He trusted Suzy to take him where he was going and Pablo Chubic to lead the way.

Day by slow, sun-heavy day they climbed up out of the Tierra Caliente into the Tierra Templada. Here it was cooler, the sun much more bearable, and there were no signs of war. Pablo had swung out around both Tomalto and Puebla over a series of side roads and trails, Waldemar recognized. The boy knew the country as he had said, and no more than twice had he looked at the map.

Along the route they followed they met nobody but easily moving, slowly spoken peasants. Those people came from Oaxaca with burros laden with vanilla that sweetened the dusty air. Ox carts that had huge, solid wooden wheels hauled maguey to the presses of the distant plantations, and in the ditches women hunkered making the oval-shaped *tortilla* cakes out of maize. The greetings were always the same, *"Que tal, hombres?"* Then, when they had answered, *"Vaya con Dios."*

You're far from the Legion, Waldemar mused. These are a peaceful people who know little if anything about war. He began to wonder why he was in Mexico. You came to serve an Austrian emperor and a Belgian empress, put on their throne by Napoleon of France and the same Franz Josef whose troops you fought against in Lombardy. It's a strange business, soldier. The Mexicans don't want you or any foreigners here. This country belongs to them and they fight for it like mountain lions . . .

The thought disturbed him. He kept his mind away from it by talking with Pablo about the region ahead. There, Pablo said, was the great cordillera of Las Combres. His home village was in the high reaches behind the first range. It was the ancient, fabulous Aztec land, named Anahuác. The trees were pines and firs, the air clear and sharp, sharp as the keenest machete. Eagles soared the gorges; hawks fell straight in drumming descent upon the village chickens. "I will be happy to get back there, *Legionario."*

"Don't call me Legionnaire," Waldemar grunted. "Not for a while, anyhow." He had discarded his blue, gold-buttoned tunic, put it and his kepi in a haversack. His loose white trousers and thick *brodequins* were covered with dust and not particularly noticeable as military, and he wore on the back of his bald skull a felt sombrero, the decorated draw-cord dangling beneath his chin. "You and I are just a couple of friends out for a ride," he went on. "Tell me some more about this Anahuác."

Pablo's somber eyes lightened. "First," he said, "I must tell you that I wasn't conscripted from my village. I heard of the war up there and I ran away to the fighting."

"There you go!" Waldemar snapped at him. "Back on the same damned subject. How about the mountains?"

The mountains were magnificent, Pablo admitted. Where two of them met together, the dead passed, but the road was guarded by the spirits of the great snake and the great alligator, the eight deserts and the eight hills. A small dog was put by a dead man's side to carry him across the nine waters.

"You're real cheerful," Waldemar said. "You start talking about war and end up talking about the dead."

Pablo grinned, understanding Waldemar very well. He stroked Suzy's neck where he rode ahead of the other tandem style. "Tell me again the story of the hand of Danjou," he said. "Then of how you got the goatskin bag from the chieftain in those other mountains."

"All right," Waldemar said. "But it's dry work. You sure your people make good *pulque?*"

"The best in all of Las Combres," Pablo said. "My father keeps his own supply, always a big jugful."

"Ca y est!" Waldemar said, and wet his lips with anticipation. "You know how the captain was killed, and why I took the hand with me, have it there in the haversack. I explained to you, too, about Sevastopol, and the cold weather we had during the siege. Danjou was wounded by a sniper one night, and his hand froze. The *medicos* were forced to amputate it. But the Beni-Snassen, they're another story. They're over in Africa, a tribe of the Kabyle people, and tough. I was lucky to get the bag from the chieftain. They're big men, who carry knives in their teeth while they fight, and whose women come after them to finish off the wounded."

Pablo swung around on the mule's broad back to look at Waldemar. "In truth, you're a lucky man to be alive."

"Too much so to want to go back to my outfit," Waldemar said. Then he was silent, caught in morose thought, remembering the hand of Danjou. He must take it back, he knew. If he didn't, all his life would be without meaning. He was old and tired, stiff with his wounds and sick of war, still he would hate himself if the captain's hand wasn't returned to the Legion . . .

The thought became more and more insistent in the days after Pablo brought him to the village of Miramente high in the Las Combres cordillera. The village people had believed Pablo lost, and his family gave a huge party of celebration. Waldemar ate roast pig and *tamales* stuffed with chicken and beans, drank *mescal* in preparation for the *pulque.* He took the *pulque* jug to the hut Pablo's folks had given to him, drank himself into numbness, woke up to repeat.

He was drunk for a week. At the end of that he had the shakes so badly his teeth clattered like loose piano keys and he lived in a gray world of abysmal misery. It was his impression that he was going blind due to the effects of the head wound he had received at Camerone. He got out the Colt to shoot himself, and only the thought of the hand of Danjou restrained him. He stumbled, stooped and groaning, to the door of the hut and called for Pablo.

The boy came running. "I've taken care of Suzy," he told Waldemar before he was aware of the man's condition. "I watered her and fed her, and just now I beat the fastest mule in the village in a race. The prize was a jugful of *pulque* and you can have it."

"Don't mention that word," Waldemar said, and collapsed against the wall of the hut. "Listen to me. I'm an old man, blind and dying of my wounds."

"You aren't sure it isn't—" Pablo began.

"No!" Waldemar shouted and added several new curses to Pablo's vocabulary. "Get this straight. You're to take Suzy and go down to Puebla. You'll find the Legion, and not just the Legion but the First Battalion. Look for Lieutenant Ganz. He was sick the day of Camerone, so he missed the action and he's all right. Tell the Lieutenant's what happened and where I am. Make him know that I have the hand of Danjou on which we all swore the oath. If you don't meet up with him, look for Corporal Maine or Corporal Berg. They survived from my company, the Third, and they'll understand what should be done."

"But how am I going to find the Legion?" Pablo said. "And who'll believe me if I do?"

"Suzy will be with you," Waldemar

muttered, up through the depths of his misery. "She has the Legion brand on her quarter, and anyhow everybody in the regiment knows her."

"My father would be angry if I left," Pablo said. "He still doesn't like it that I went away last time."

Waldemar groped across the hut and took down from the wall pegs the Kabyle goatskin sack. He drew out from it the long-barreled Colt revolver. "The sack's yours if you make the trip," he said. "And you can carry the revolver. All right?"

"*Muy bien,*" Pablo said. He smoothed his fingers over the scrolled work of the sack, hung it from his shoulder by the braided strap. Then he took the Colt and with a flick of the wrist killed half a dozen imaginary enemies. "Tonight, after my father is asleep . . ."

"Sleep, that's what I need," Waldemar said. He flopped down upon the pile of pine boughs in the corner. "But tell them in the battalion to hurry back here. I'll be dead unless they do. I'm an old and a sick and blind man."

Pablo leaned over to pat his shoulder, but Waldemar was already asleep.

CHAPTER III

THE ASSAULT

IT WAS great delight for Pablo to ride Suzy. Always before Waldemar had been aboard the big sorrel animal with him. Now he could move at a fast canter along the Las Combres trails and out on the plain below on the open road he could keep to a trot hour after hour.

But in Puebla they told him that the Legion had gone south. It was engaged in the siege of Oaxaca, and he had better get out of town before somebody took that mule from him. Pablo thought that over, then decided on Oaxaca.

He had deserted in fright from his first battle, he remembered, and here was a chance to test himself again. More, he had become romantically impressed by Waldemar's possession of the hand of Danjou, wanted to share the thrill the Legion would have when he told them of it. He kept Suzy steadily moving south.

Headquarters for the Oaxacan campaign was at a place called Hacienda Blanca. He came to it on foot leading a scrawny and very jaded Suzy. The last few days had passed with little water and no food for him and the mule. In front of the thick-walled headquarters building, though, he recognized the short tunics and flat kepis of the Legion, sneaked past the sentries and asked an orderly for Lieutenant Ganz of the First Battalion.

Lieutenant Ganz was a broad man become swarthy with the southern sun, a beard down over his tunic collar. He eyed Suzy thoughtfully and then Pablo Chubic. "You were sent by Legionnaire Waldemar Karig?" he said.

"*Si, Teniente,*" Pablo said. "He is sick and at my home in the mountains."

"Sick, or drunk?" Ganz said.

Pablo shrugged. "Maybe one from the other. But he was wounded at Camerone and it was near there I met him. He charged me to come and see you or somebody of the Legion. It is that he wants you to know that he has the hand of the Captain Danjou."

"I might have you put in the guardhouse, *chico,*" Ganz said in a slow voice. "It would be easy for me to think that you're a liar or a spy. But Captain Danjou served with me for years. We were together at—"

"—the Malakoff works in front of Sevastopol," Pablo said. "Then in Lombardy, then against the Beni-Snassen in Algeria."

Ganz took a quick stride. He grasped the boy by the shoulder. "You know a lot," he said.

"But yes, *Teniente.* And I tell it to you so that you'll believe me. A spy, though, I'm not that . . . They wouldn't send one as innocent as me."

Ganz put back his bearded chin and laughed. "Wait here," he said. "I want to get Berg and Maine to talk to you."

Both Berg and Maine were hard-faced men. They looked Pablo Chubic over closely, studied Suzy, the Kabyle sack and the Colt. "He's been wherever old Leather Gut was," Maine finally murmured. "This is Karig's mule and gear."

"Listen, young one," Berg said, his glance intense. "The names of Danjou and Maudet and Vilain have been put

in gold on the wall of the Palais des Invalides at Paris. The word Camerone is on our battle flag. For us, the hand of Danjou is a very great thing."

"I understand so," Pablo said. "That's why I'm here. Waldemar wants you to come to my village of Miramente for the hand of Danjou."

Berg began to speak again and stopped. A trumpeter ran from the door of headquarters, swung up his instrument and blew a swift, stirring call which Pablo knew to be Assembly. The Legionnaires stared at each other; more trumpets were sounding and out in the encampment beyond orders were shouted, repeated. "Time we went," Ganz told Maine and Berg. "It's the assault."

"You think that I should stay here?" Pablo asked, worried that they had forgotten him.

"Get back off the road with Suzy," Ganz said. "Don't bother with anybody and don't let anybody bother you. Be sure and wait for us."

The regiments moved out at the double, the Legion, the Zouaves, the Chasseurs d'Afrique, some few cavalry, and after them the sappers and heavy artillery. Pablo watched wide-eyed, holding Suzy tight by the hackamore. This was war such as he had never known it. Here was the beginning of a tremendous engagement.

But a Legionnaire with the red *galons* and emblems of a supply sergeant had noticed him and Suzy. The sergeant crossed the road between the pounding columns. "Where did you get that mule?" he said.

"Belongs to a friend of mine," Pablo said. "Waldemar Karig of the Third Company of the First Battalion."

"Like hell," the sergeant said. "The First's already gone up to the attack. Give me the mule, *chiquito,* if you like keeping healthy. Animals are valuable around here."

Pablo thought of the Colt; he thought of wheeling Suzy around and making a flying leap for her back, then a galloped retreat. But the sergeant seemed to understand his notion, stood ready to strike. Pablo released the hackamore. "Waldemar will be very angry," he said confusedly. "It's his mule."

When the sergeant went along the road with Suzy, he followed at a discreet distance. Maybe in the battle, he thought, he could get a chance to claim Suzy again, ride away with her. But right ahead now were the gun pits and the entrenchments and he could see through the flare of battle smoke the walls of the fortress of Oaxaca.

Howitzers and siege cannon flung forward their destruction around him. Wounded were already coming back from the first assault, some blind, some without arms and legs. Pablo's stomach muscles began to quiver. He hadn't liked battle at Camerone, he recalled, and his feeling hadn't changed.

A red-glowing solid shot suddenly plunged from one of the Oaxaca battlements and sighed through the air. Pablo ducked, his hands about his head. There was a frightful shock, a clang of iron, screams, low cries. He looked up to see what was left of the French siege gun and its crew beside him. His new-found sense of maturity and all his curiosity left him. He wheeled around and ran out across the fields, back from the battle, anywhere that he might be safe.

PABLO'S father had a determined expression and a machete in his belt. With him were the *cacique* of the village and six or seven other men. They stood at the door of the hut and beckoned to Waldemar to come out. "Sure, friends," Waldemar said. "Right away."

He knew what they wanted, he told himself, and he was ready. His terrible headache had disappeared, his sight returned a few days after he had finished the *pulque.* Since then he had recognized how wrong he was to have sent Pablo off on Suzy, and he had taken great care to bury the hand of Danjou at night. He had made a tight, weather-proof box for the hand, stolen out in the darkness to dig a hole beneath a great fir tree at the edge of the village. With things as uncertain as they were, it was much better to leave it there. He might lose it on the trail or have it taken from him when the villagers chased him out . . .

"Where is my son?" Pablo's father asked.

"No sabe," Waldemar said, blinking.

"But your mule is gone. Pablo took it. You sent him some place on it." That was the *cacique,* the top man in the village talking, and Waldemar intently listened. "You can tell his father where he is gone?"

"No," Waldemar said, "except that I sent him to find my outfit."

The *cacique* frowned. He indicated one of the young men in the group. "That one," he told Waldemar, "has just come back from outside the mountains. Your lot is marching north in the direction of Monterey. You had better go meet it. Leave us. This is no place for you any more."

"Maybe you're right," Waldemar said cautiously, thinking of the mountain trails without Suzy to carry him. "I'll go tomorrow, in full daylight."

"Now and not tomorrow," the *cacique* said. "You understand what I mean?"

Waldemar tried to smile. "Sure," he said. "Sure, friend . . ."

He came upon the Legion at the foot of the mountains, headed for the northeastern states and the fighting there. He had rehearsed his story many times while he waited alongside the road, wasn't afraid when the advance patrol sent him back to the colonel.

"I've heard all that before," the colonel said. He tugged at his little white beard and watched Waldemar with baleful eyes. "Lieutenant Ganz told it to me at Oaxaca; some Mexican boy came around with it and then disappeared. I don't believe a word. Of course if you could produce for me the hand of Danjou, that would be a different thing."

"But, *mon Colonel,* if you—"

"If I wasn't short of men," the colonel said, "I'd have you shot. But the man handling your company's mules is a worse drunk even than yourself. Take over from him, and no more drunkenness, lying or malingering. Dismissed!"

Waldemar hoarsely sighed to show that vast injustice was being done him, but then gave the colonel his smartest salute, banged his heels with precision as he about-faced.

Suzy was among the company animals. She stamped and neighed in joy at sight of him, put her muzzle up against his neck, and he felt much better. But Lieutenant Ganz was riding down the line and he stared hard-eyed at Waldemar. "Don't make any mistake, Leather Gut," Ganz said. "The colonel let you get away with it once, but it won't happen again. I'll be watching you all the while, and so will Maine and Berg. Where's the hand of Danjou?"

"Up in the Las Combres mountains, in the village that boy came from. I buried it there to keep it safe."

"Why did you send him, and not bring it back yourself?"

"Because I was afraid I'd lose it if I carried it any more. You see, I'm not in very good shape, Lieutenant, and I wasn't sure I could make the trip."

"You'll be in a lot worse unless you start to do some work," Ganz said. "Now get those mules up the road. And don't ride Suzy. She's a pack animal, not your special mount."

"Oui, m'sieu le Lieutenant," Waldemar said, and saluted. But inside him the rage hotly rose. So this is the treatment they give you, he thought. Names and insults when you swear on your word of honor as a Legionnaire that you saved for them the hand of Danjou. Just because you drink occasionally, and spent a few weeks in the mountains getting in shape. But they forget that you're a soldier, Waldemar. You'll have to show them, and then they'll believe all you've said . . .

For him, though, there was little actual combat in the north. He tried it once at Vittoria after bringing Suzy to a forward unit with a load of ammunition. He left her and joined the assault wave, rushed far out in front beside the color bearer. When he came back across the plaza he passed the colonel. The colonel gestured to him, and his hope sprang high. Now, he told himself, the man will listen.

THE colonel leaned down from his horse. His saber as he swung it almost nicked the end off Waldemar's nose. "Your duty is as a muleteer," he said. "Keep out of the assault ranks. Try anything more like that and you go to prison for at least five years."

"Oui, mon Colonel," Waldemar said, and Suzy stepping neatly behind him, swung to the rear.

But he found half a gallon or so of *pulque* that night, hid in among the mules on the picket line while he drank it. His despair was complete. Pablo had disappeared leaving no trace, he realized. If you don't have the boy to guide you, you'll never get back to Miramente. And instead of praise or trust from the colonel, you get slapped with talk about a prison piece. The men here in the company think you're good for nothing except as a target for their stupid jokes. You're all through, Waldemar. It was a damned bad day when you decided to take the hand of Danjou . . . He rolled down finally in a stupor and pitched under Suzy's belly, slept there until at daylight she nudged him awake.

His head seemed to contract and expand as though his temples were part of huge, slamming bellows. His mouth felt as if a fire made of old scraps of leather and rubber burned there. He saw three Suzies and six picket lines; the supply sergeant's face was like a comet that was about to explode against his own. "Saddle and pack," the supply sergeant said. "We're pulling out."

"Coffee," Waldemar whispered through the volcano that was his throat. "Coffee, in the name of God."

Somebody he barely saw put a coffee tin in his hand and he drank. The stuff fell down the collapsing cavern of his stomach, then hit like a load of logs off a cliff. He staggered and swayed from side to side, and the supply sergeant said, "Look at Leather Gut. He's practicing to go in the ballet."

But the column was in motion, and he clung to Suzy's harness and moved along to keep from being trampled. He counted at least a thousand times during the morning when he thought he had taken his last stride, and at noon there was no halt. He gazed in black horror at the man ahead of him and croaked, "Where are we going?"

"Monterey," the other said. "We're supposed to relieve the place. That means thirty of these leagues—more than a hundred and fifty miles—that we march without a break."

Waldemar lacked the strength to speak further; he was too weak to remember how to pray. He just kept lifting one boot and putting it down in front of the other and in the hammering sunlight the fumes of the *pulque* he exuded set up around his head a little silver cloud like a halo.

Suzy was hauling him in the saddle, all but unconscious, at the end. When the order to halt was given, Waldemar slumped at her sweat-streaked side, fumbled to release the pack and harness straps. The familiar motions returned a bit of clarity to his thinking and he

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stared gloomily out over Suzy's back in the dusk.

The horizon held the vast purple peaks of the Las Combres cordillera. He was going there tonight, he and Suzy. Maybe they'd get to Miramente without Pablo, and maybe they wouldn't. But they'd try. He'd had enough of this. Unless he could prove he had saved the hand of Captain Danjou, he was finished in the Legion . . .

The chill mists before dawn awakened him. He recalled his promise to himself and silently saddled Suzy, loaded his sacks with food and water and fodder while around him the company lay in deep sleep. He eased Suzy away pace by soft pace towards a small depression at the edge of the bivouac. Along that and then he came to the road.

He crossed it and headed for the mountains.

But a sentry from another company challenged him as he cut across the road, fired a shot when he didn't answer. He was already mounted. Flattened down upon Suzy's neck, he went into the mesquite at a quick gallop. The sentry failed to fire again, although there were some shouts from the bivouac. You're all right, Waldemar, he thought. Just keep on going.

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"You should have known it was getting too tough for the oldtimer," he muttered as he strode through the mists to Captain Saussier, the commander of the column.

"A man has deserted my outfit," he told Saussier. "It's old Leather Gut Karig, the one who swears he took the hand of Danjou and hid it up in the mountains."

"Go and get him and bring him back," Saussier said. "We don't want any deserters. Also, to have the hand of Danjou later would be a fine thing. I can only let you detach a small patrol. But choose men you trust. That's bad country out there. And there is no sense in taking unnecessary risks."

"Thanks," Ganz said. "Danjou was a personal friend of mine, and all the men who'll go with me are survivors of his company."

stared gloomily out over Suzy's back in the dusk.

The horizon held the vast purple peaks of the Las Combres cordillera. He was going there tonight, he and Suzy. Maybe they'd get to Miramente without Pablo, and maybe they wouldn't. But they'd try. He'd had enough of this. Unless he could prove he had saved the hand of Captain Danjou, he was finished in the Legion . . .

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CHAPTER IV

SAFE CONDUCT

WALDEMAR was asleep in the saddle before mid-morning. Despite all his usual wariness and his great desire to get to Miramente and regain the hand of Danjou, the effects of the march just past were too much for him. He nodded and yawned, attempted to hold his aching body upright, and still he could not remain awake. He slid over further and further in the saddle, lost the last of his balance and fell. He pitched asprawl within the shade of a big yucca plant and when he began to arise fatigue held him down.

Suzy had halted, he noticed with some relief, and that was a good sign. A real campaigner like her didn't halt if danger was nearby. His eyelids sagged shut, his mouth open, and he returned fully to sleep.

But Suzy was nervous, kept watching the way they had come, at last kicked him firmly in the ribs. He sat up and de-

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scribed her parentage, then saw the dust clouds out on the plain. There were two. One was made by a band of mounted men and it was large, moved fast. The other was between it and him, and beneath the tawny dust swirl he could distinguish Legion kepis and bayonet points. No more than ten men were in the Legion group, though, and they turned to fire upon the mounted band behind.

A feeling of profound regret came to Waldemar. Fear wasn't the source; he had known too much of death to be influenced by its presence. But he recognized what was going on out there and the effect it would have on his chances to reach Miramente. A Legion unit had been sent out to bring him back. That had been intercepted and cut off from the column by a roaming force of Juarista horsemen.

If he missed being captured by the Legion, he'd be caught by the Juaristas, and they took no prisoners.

"What a hell of a war," he said to Suzy. "The French pass an order to shoot all prisoners, so the Juaristas do the same. Now a man can't go on a little trip without getting his head banged in one way or the other." But Suzy was wheeling around. She was starting at a smart trot towards the Legion. Waldemar grasped the reins, swung stiffly into the saddle. "You and I go together, Suzy, no matter where . . ."

Lieutenant Ganz had a hard time restraining the men of the patrol. They dumped Waldemar prone, gathered around him with their carbines clubbed and raised. "No," Ganz snapped at them. "Giving him the cure won't help us. We'll hold him for later when we can get some pleasure out of it. Our job is to shake loose from that bunch behind."

"Won't Captain Saussier send a relieving force after us, sir?" Corporal Maine inquired.

Ganz faintly smiled. "Saussier is in the middle of a battle over there. We can't get back and we'll have to try for the mountains."

"That's only about five miles away," Waldemar said, remembering the meaning that the hand of Danjou was supposed to have for these men. "I know the trails, and I'll take you right to where—"

"Shut up, you!" Maine swung his carbine against Waldemar's skull with a jouncing crack. "The time we'll trust you is when you're dead."

"Trust Suzy, then, and not me," Waldemar said stubbornly. The ragged, dark-faced horsemen were on the nearest ridge. Musket balls kicked through the air and over the stones. "I know what I'm in for, but she's a good mule."

"All right," Ganz said. "We go up in the mountains. We'll be cleaned out if we make a stand here in the open. Sling the old slob up on the mule and let her lead the way. She should be able to find the trail."

Waldemar had nothing but disordered and vague impressions of that journey into the mountains. He rode dully forward on Suzy, head-down, eyes often shut, all of his spirit gone from him. But Ganz was a fine soldier, and obviously Suzy knew the trail, for at dusk they were free of pursuit by the Juaristas.

They camped and sentries were posted. A small fire was made, food cooked. The tough corporal, Berg, brought Waldemar his ration, put it down beside him in silence. "I don't want it," Waldemar said. "I want to take care of the mule."

"Lieutenant's orders," Berg said, and touched the pistol at his hip. "You move, you get shot. Don't worry—we'll tend to the mule."

Waldemar lay awake all night. He listened through the wind in the pines to the snuffling sound Suzy made when she slept. He returned in memory to the first time he had seen Suzy. It had been at the remount stables of the base at Sidi-bel-Abbes. Suzy was young then, sleek and handsome, had brought a fine price for the Arab who had sold her. She had served well in the mountain campaigns, carrying the wounded with great skill and tenderness. At Sevastopol she had been stoic under fire, motionless when being unloaded, afterwards making her way easily along the narrow turnings of the entrenchments where men ducked and crawled to evade the enemy sniper fire. During Solferino he had been in charge of her part of the time, and she had made many trips through the wicked cross enfilades in the streets to bring out

wounded and come back again with badly needed ammunition.

Suzy was his only friend. Now, though, he was denied even her care. Life wasn't only finished for him in the Legion. It was finished for good. Lying there, he tried to discover the reasons. You were mistaken in leaving the hand of Danjou up on the mountain. If you had brought it with you, there wouldn't be any trouble. But you didn't, and so you're going to be shot. And who'll explain to Suzy when they take you out before the firing squad?

That thought, of Suzy left without him, sent tears against his eyes. You can't get shot, he repeated over and over to himself until the hour of dawn.

GANZ was up with the dawn. He ordered camp struck and Suzy saddled. But when Berg, at the lieutenant's command, started to head her down the trail, she whirled and kicked the corporal in the belly. Maine jumped forward and she gave him a perfect sample of the same treatment. Berg, panting and prostrate, pulled out his pistol. "I'll fix her," he yelled.

"Wait a minute," Waldemar called in a furious voice from where he stood at the rear of the little column. "Suzy knows what she's doing. There must be somebody down below on the trail."

Ganz crept to the edge of the trail, stared down into the misty valley. "The oldtimer's right," he said. "That bunch caught up to us during the night. Their scouts are out among the trees below." He turned, and his face was stern, drawn. "How far to the village where you stayed, Legionnaire?"

"Another four hours' climb," Waldemar said, startled and pleased that the lieutenant had called him Legionnaire. "The folks in it aren't the scrappy kind. They won't bother us and we'll be safe."

"If you're wrong—" Ganz began, and stopped himself. "Fall in! Let's go!"

The people of the village of Miramente stood sullen, wordless as they came up the short street. But Waldemar, his confidence restored by Ganz, called out, "Where's my friend, Pablo? I want to see him."

"You ask for Pablo," the *cacique* answered, "and it was you who tricked him into going away from here. He took the mule you ride, and if he's back it's no fault of yours."

"Listen," Waldemar said. "I did Pablo no harm. He went away because he felt like it. But we're not here to bother you. I want to get something I left under a tree, and then we're going to help you. A band of armed men is coming up the trail."

The *cacique's* glance was hard and narrow. "What is under a tree?" he said. "Who are the men coming up the trail?" He made a quick gesture and the village elders disappeared into the huts, returned with machetes and flintlocks, a huge horse pistol.

"We seek a hand," Waldemar said, beginning to feel confused again. "It belonged to our dead captain."

"Here is a wild one," the *cacique* said. "He is either a liar or mad."

But Waldemar paid him no attention. He turned, hearing the shout. Pablo was at the end of the village street; he loped its length with a rapid stride. *"Como, hombre?"* he said to Waldemar and lifted the old man down out of the saddle. "It's fine you and the other Legionnaires are here. This day we need you. I saw you coming, but I waited to make sure of the lot that was behind you."

"Talk now to me!" the *cacique* said, and grasped Pablo by the shirtfront.

"Those who came from Mesa Alta last month and stole our sheep are on the trail again. They were close in back of the Legion."

"But they're Juaristas, your own troops," Ganz said. He had moved beside the *cacique* and Pablo. "They shouldn't harm you."

A strange, bitter smile tightened the lines of the *cacique's* face. "Juaristas down on the plain," he said, "outlaws in the mountains. They are men who have gone to the war to rob. When they were here before, we killed three, and they will want a lot of vengeance from us. But we'll stop them on the trail, roll boulders down on their heads."

"Let us handle this for you," Ganz said. "We're professional soldiers."

The *cacique* took a backward pace. He lifted the antique horse pistol and a machete from the grasp of one of the

elders. "How do we know," he said, "that you aren't part of that lot?"

"I'm a lieutenant of the Legion," Ganz said. "Of the Third Company of the First Battalion." Rage had sent a spread of color across his face and his voice was harsh.

"Come on, sir," Maine said. "Let these sports get murdered their own way. We can take care of ourselves out in the woods."

Nobody there watched Waldemar. He dropped the reins over Suzy's head to keep her still, slipped away past the huts. Now's your time, Waldemar, he told himself. Now you must do it. These people gave you shelter. They took care of you. Pablo is one of them; they have a nice village. It's the place where you hid the hand of Danjou . . .

HE WAS at the end of the street. Ahead of him, majestic with the sun upon its branches, was the tall fir tree. He knelt down and lifted the flat stone between two roots. The soil beneath the stone was sandy, came loose as he clawed at it with every bit of his strength. The cavity became deeper, wider, but for a moment he couldn't see the box, thought with a shock of fear that it wasn't there.

But then he had his fingers on it, was lifting it out. He fumbled open the crude latch he had made, pushed back the lid. The hand of Danjou lay within just as he had left it, and he murmured, "*Bon!* How very good . . ." The box like that, open in his grasp, he sprinted back up the street.

Men were behind him, he sensed, but he didn't slow down to turn and look at them. They were the outlaws; he was sure of that, and it was enough. What counted was to show the hand of Danjou to the Legionnaires.

Ganz and the *cacique* faced each other in an extreme tension of nervous fury. The *cacique* had the horse pistol raised like a miniature cannon, and Ganz was clasping the grip of the holstered revolver on his belt. On either side of the street but still no more than a few paces apart, the Legionnaires and the villagers stood in the same poses and with the same intention as their leaders. Waldemar came between them, his glance down upon the box and the hand of Danjou.

"You want to fight these folks," he said to Ganz, "when it's in their village this has been kept?"

Ganz started to speak and a sort of grunting noise came from him. He stared down into the earth-crusted box. His fingers touched it, slowly, with delicate care, then moved within, brought forth the hand of Danjou. "So," he whispered. "So it is true."

Maine came forward, hearing him and seeing what he held, and after Maine there was Berg and the others who had survived. It was Waldemar's impression that they stood gazing down at the hand of Danjou for a long time. But later he knew that it was only for a very few seconds. The outlaws had moved up from the head of the trail to the fir tree. They spread out there in a fan-shaped fashion to throw a careless volley into the village street.

The women and the children scampered for the doors of the huts. The *cacique* and the rest of the men very wisely flung themselves flat. But Ganz and the Legionnaires who had been studying the hand of Danjou acted with deliberation. Ganz dropped the hand back in the box, gave the box to Waldemar. "Keep this safe," he said. "Get in one of those houses." Then he took his sword from the scabbard, unholstered his pistol. There was no order called; he and the other Legionnaires simply charged at the full run along the street.

Waldemar was conscious of bayonets being locked to carbine muzzles, of flopping, torn trousers and faded blue tunics that were far too big as targets. But the villagers were joining the Legion. The *cacique* and the elders were also racing down the street.

"In here, Waldemar." That was Pablo. "I have already brought in Suzy and in the corner is a jug of *pulque*. Later, I will see you. If you lose the hand, though, things will be very bad for you."

Waldemar sat and drank with the box held tight between his knees. Suzy whinnied and stamped once or twice when the fighting got close, but when he tried to get to his feet she blocked the way to the door. "Needn't worry," he muttered at her. "You're Legion, too, and you know I have my orders."

DOWN at the foot of Las Combres where Pablo left them the next day there was a large and well-uniformed force of Mexican regular cavalry. The young colonel put his mustang forward at the canter, offered Ganz an easy salute. "I have been sent, *Teniente,*" he said, "to take you and your group to Puebla."

Ganz gazed bleakly at his weary, sagging files and Pablo standing tense-faced where he led Suzy. "You mean surrender?"

"No." The colonel stroked his mustang's neck. "We're here to give you safe conduct to Puebla, from where you are to be sent out to the coast. All French troops have been ordered to leave Mexico, including the Legion."

"Muy bien," Ganz said. "But allow me to pass that on to my men. They're—a lot who like to fight."

"So I understand," the colonel said dryly. "Yesterday, up at Miramente, you did quite well indeed against the bandit forces."

"Thank you," Ganz said.

"The thanks should be shared," the colonel said, and bowed.

Waldemar was far down in the misery of his *pulque* hangover. The other Legionnaires bawled the news at him, but he didn't get it straight until almost into Puebla. Then Ganz came and rode at his side. Ganz touched the box which was secured inside his tunic. "I have it here, Leather Gut," he said. "We'll take it back with us to our Salle d'Honneur at Sidi-bel-Abbes."

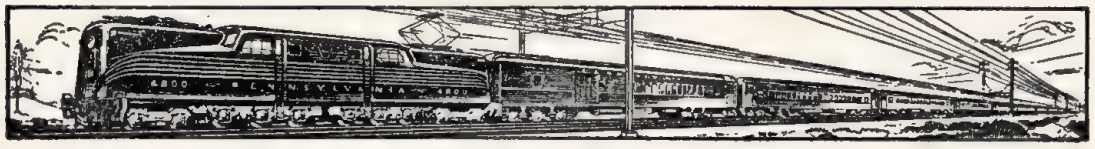
"Well, all right, we're going back," Waldemar mumbled. "But you know what's going to happen to me."

"Sure," Ganz said. "You'll get the Military Medal and you and Suzy will be retired. You're both finished with the duty."

"That's the trouble," Waldemar said, a tragic look in his bleary eyes. "The regiment throws me out and I go to Strasbourg because I haven't any other place to go. Who believes me, though, when I tell them about Camerone? The hand of Danjou will be in the Salle d'Honneur and I'll just be another drunken old soldier with a story nobody can believe."

"You're wrong," Ganz said. "When you're discharged, there'll be a good payoff coming to you. If you don't drink it up, you'll have more than enough to buy Suzy."

Waldemar straightened in the saddle. He laughed so hard that Suzy cocked her ears in surprise. "I hadn't figured that way," he said. "If they don't believe me back in Strasbourg, she'll just kick the hell out of them . . ."



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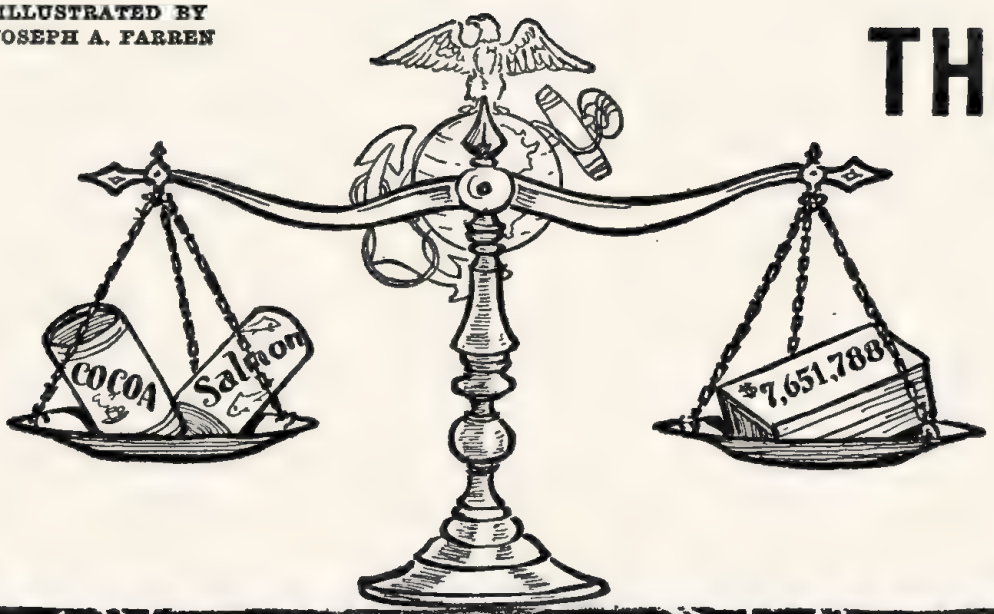

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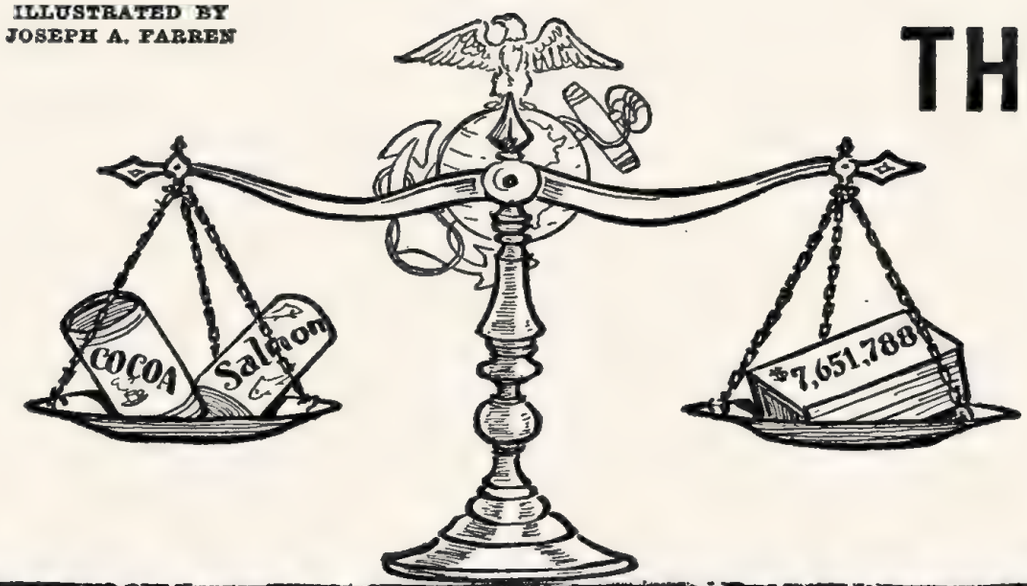
THE GREAT MUZZLE BLAST

By GUY RICHARDS

SERGEANT Hilary S. F. Maguire, the Great Muzzle Blast, had always known that there were strong similarities between him and his old commanding officer. Major Sweeney was tall and talkative; the sarge was short and talkative. Major Sweeney had an imagination tinctured with gratitude for the troubles he had escaped; Sergeant Maguire had an imagination stimulated greatly by the troubles he had caused. Now it seemed that he was about to cause more trouble, this time at the expense of Major Sweeney. The Navy's judge advocate had called the sarge to testify before a general court martial, with the major as defendant. If the judge advocate were to be believed, he, Sweeney, had been guilty of a slight lapse of discretion which had led him



The sentry points up our roadway and bellows: "WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN?"

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to "misappropriate $7,651,788 worth of Government property, much of it for his own personal use, and to plan and carry out three conspiracies to commit fraud against the Government, the country then being in a state of war."

The Great Muzzle Blast sat in the second row of courtroom chairs with what seemed to be an air of puzzled defiance, if not outright distaste for his allotted role. He looked like a crushed statue of Atlas. His scant height and enormous head and shoulders described a peculiar combination of bigness-on-littleness, like that of a pumpkin impaled on a kitchen spoon. It was this illusion that caused, for the most part, the eventual sorrow of those who, seeing the spoon before the pumpkin, mistook him for a minor personage.

Occasionally he gazed at the witness chair he was soon to occupy. Occasionally he looked around—and gulped. But as soon as the reporter started to read the charges, the sarge's jaw jutted forward into what the Quantico crowd calls his "Number One Firing Position." A gleam lit his gnarled features as the reporter droned through the paragraphs of allegations against Major Sweeney, ending in that fatal tagline which puts the weight of an extra prison stretch on every sentence in the Navy— "the country then being in a state of war."

The sound of the word "war" seemed to rally the sarge. His face filled with a softly enraptured expression, like that of a classic Shakespearean actress when, as Juliet, she hears the magic name of Romeo.

He turned to Fantail Smith in the chair behind him.

"Who, I would like to know," he whispered hoarsely, "went so far as to tell anyone around Washington that this country was in a state of war? Hell, a slip of the tongue like that must have spilled a thousand cocktail glasses!"

Commander Reid, the judge advocate, cleared his throat.

"Gunnery Sergeant Hilary S. F. Maguire?"

"Here, sir. And thanks for calling me Gunnery Sergeant, sir. I don't like this new Technical Sergeant they're calling us now."

"Take the witness chair, please."

ALL THE practiced bravado of more than a thousand appearances before troops buoyed up the great Muzzle Blast as he swaggered like a tenor from the Spanish opera across twenty-odd feet of courtroom. The eyes in the room were on him. By the time he had reached the witness chair, his superb aplomb had won the audience without a word. Yet when he sat down his lips could be seen to quiver. His right hand nervously fingered a button on his blouse. Obviously he wasn't doing so well. The lion couchant only palely echoed the thundering self-assurance of the lion rampant.

Maguire was sworn in. "Sergeant Maguire," said Commander Reid, who, as judge advocate, was also the prosecutor, "you are acquainted with Major Arthur Sweeney over there?"

"Yes, sir."

"In fact, you were serving with him, were you not, at the time he was in command of the Champs du Ciel Airport in New Caledonia?"

"Yes, sir."

"What were your duties there, Sergeant?"

"I was in charge of all the weapons, sir, and I was acting first sergeant of the Guard Company—that is, of all the Marines under Major Sweeney."

Commander Reid paused to describe a full parabola of footsteps in front of the eleven members of the court. He looked as if he were about to pose a pretty pertinent question.

"Now you are aware that Major Sweeney had a nickname—or perhaps I should say still has a nickname—which was acquired at that airport?"

"I believe so—yes, sir."

" 'ALL-BUT-ONE' Sweeney, isn't that it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What does that mean, Sergeant? What faculty or trait of Major Sweeney's was being honored by the creation of that nickname?"

"Why, I—I'm not exactly sure, sir."

"Think back, Sergeant."

"I'm thinking back, sir."

"Now what does that nickname pay tribute to?"

"Sir, I—I think it pays tribute to the major's detective ability, to his skill as

an investigator. There were certain supplies that disappeared one time and the major got to work and found almost everything, I believe, sir—all but one of everything, I guess it was."

Commander Reid leaned forward insinuatingly and almost purred out, "Are you sure it doesn't mean that he stole everything he could lay his hands on and then—when the jig was up—agreed to return all but one of everything?"

"No, sir!" said the sarge, "I'm damn sure it doesn't mean anything of the kind! And if you'll let me tell you how he got that nickname in my own words I—I'll—"

The president of the court, the silver-haired Colonel August J. Klemfous, leaned forward. There was a certain amount of whispering between the colonel and the other members of the court and finally the colonel said, "Sergeant, this court is anxious to find out the whole truth in this matter. Your testimony may help, so your request is granted. Tell everything you know to be a fact about what happened at that airport."

The expression on Maguire's face changed into the warm, narrative glow that you could find on it almost any day after recall at the NCO club, in Quantico. He rose perceptibly in his chair. His whole bearing suffered a sort of radiant inflation.

"Well, sir-r-r," he replied, "it is all long ago, now, so long ago I'm surprised the matter hasn't passed the statute of limitations. Considering everything's so peaceful now between us nations, I know it's mighty crude of me to refer to the fact that there was a war going on at the time. So shall I say, sir-r-r, that a certain number of semi-hostile acts were then marring our relations with our present devoted friends in Japan, and there was this airport—this airport—"

"Yes, Sergeant?"

"Well, sir, there's been a lot of scuttlebutt about what Major Sweeney did at that airport, but I think most of the trouble he's gotten into was due to me, sir."

"I respectfully request the court," said Commander Reid, "to remind the sergeant to relate what he knows and to keep his opinions to himself."

The sarge swung around to permit a full glare of disapproval to bore into the author of this aspersion.

"Well, sir, it was in the dark days of 1943 when our detachment arrived at this airport with Major Sweeney, who, as you may understand, sir, despite his age, was trying very hard to be transferred up to the fighting at Guadalcanal. And Colonel Collins at Noumea had told the major he could get up to Guadalcanal if he could get that airport straightened out. Well, sir, that place was about as . . . lashed up as a battalion beer party after someone's lost the bottle-opener. It was a first-class airport, all right, and big and busy, but it was a lousy tourist camp as you'd soon find out if you got stuck there overnight. There wasn't enough sleeping space for a honeymoon couple. There were big planes coming in all the time from Pearl Harbor and Guadalcanal and Australia and there were generals and admirals coming in on them with all their staffs. But there was no place to put all these officers when they got there—and they all had to spend at least one night. Maybe more, if the weather turned bad.

"We had one pyramidal tent and about a dozen shelter halves. And the only thing we had to feed them was salmon and cocoa. That's all we could get from the First Base Depot, and we always had plenty of that. We ate it every day and twice on Sundays—baked salmon and salmon cakes and salmon hash and creamed salmon and salmon loaf and salmon pie and broiled salmon—one day we even caught the mess sergeant trying to figure out a way to make salmon ice-cream. As for cocoa with every meal, I guess it's O.K. unless you happen to like coffee. We all began to have the same dream at night. There was a big red salmon trying to jump over a big chocolate falls and—"

MAGUIRE hesitated, apparently in deference to a world of gastronomic horrors that seemed about to overtake him again.

"Well, don't stop there, Sergeant," said Colonel Klemfous. "From the records of this case it would seem that your mess must have gone from salmon to caviar in pretty short order!"

"Just a minute, please, sir—we ate that cr—er—stuff along with the visiting admirals and generals for a long time before we could do anything about it. The major was under great pressure. That put me under great pressure, sir, and—"

"You don't have to remind us, Sergeant, that trouble is distributed downwards in the Marine Corps. What we want to know are the facts. Who did what about what?"

"I'm coming to that, if you please, sir, but just let me explain one more thing about that pressure. An admiral would get off his plane. A general would get off. He'd call right away for the commanding officer and Major Sweeney would have to go over.

" 'Well, glad to meet you, Sweeney,' he'd say. 'Nice airport you have here. Now Major, my staff and I have had a hard trip and we're pretty tired and all we want is some chow and a good night's rest. Just feed us up and show us where we sleep and you can forget about us.'

"At that point the major always did some very fast talking, sir. He'd generally say, 'Well, Admiral, sir, or General, sir, we're a little short on rations and canvas around here. We haven't got a Transient Officers' Mess or a Transient Officers' Barracks or anything like that. We have one pyramidal tent for flag officers but I'm afraid the rest of your staff and the crew of the plane will have to sleep in a shelter half.'

" 'A shelter half?' sometimes the admiral would say. 'What's that?'

"Then Major Sweeney would explain, and he'd go on to say that the chow was skimpy, too, mostly cocoa and salmon, in fact, entirely cocoa and salmon, the cocoa being made from water and skim milk powder, and very nourishing and tasty. He'd tell how he'd sent dispatches all over the Pacific to get some better rations and some lumber to build a barracks and a mess. But with no luck so far."

The eleven members of the court, at this juncture, began to display the first evidence of real personal interest in the testimony. They leaned forward, one by one. It is possible that they had caught an imaginary glimpse of a situation from which they derived deep pleasure—that of innumerable flag officers reduced to a diet of salmon and cocoa which they ate in a pyramidal tent preparatory to lying down to receive, perhaps, the blessed visitation of the big, red jumping salmon and the chocolate falls.

"Please continue, Sergeant."

"Well, whoever the flag officer was, sir, he'd generally think for a minute and then say 'Good God, Sweeney!' " Here the sarge's voice assumed a biting resonance. " 'Dispatches! Dispatches! That's no way to solve your problems! You should forage around, man. You're only one hundred and forty miles from the base depots in Noumea. You're in command of one of the biggest airports in the Pacific. You're entitled to a lot of supplies, yet you're willing to drift along on salmon and cocoa and shelter halves. You should use more force and ingenuity. I wonder if you're competent to fill this position."

"Wait a minute, Sergeant," interrupted Commander Reid, the judge advocate, "did you hear any of those officers order Major Sweeney to acquire more supplies by force, by fraud, by connivance?"

"No, sir," said Maguire, looking sweetly into the commander's eyes, "I never heard those words used."

"Do you know of your own first-hand knowledge that dispatches were sent over a long period of time, and to no avail, to many commands?"

Colonel Klemfous asked the question. Maguire swung around to answer him.

"Oh, yes, sir. I remember because I wrote many of them myself. We asked for rations and lumber and tarpaper and galley ware and blankets and beds and mattresses—why I was filling out requisitions all the time and then making dispatches out of them and sending them over and over to COMSOPAC and COMSERONSOPAC and FIRST MAC and CINCPAC and COMAIR SOLOMONS and COMAIRPAC and FMFPAC and COMSOWESPAC and COMNORTHPAC and FIRST BASE DEPOT and even to Army Quartermasters in Noumea, Fiji and Pearl Harbor. I might just as well have sent them all to COMICEPAC or COMHOTPAC or COMMUDPAC."

"You got no response?"

"Sometimes we'd get an acknowledgment, sir. Once COMSOPAC sent us up

a truckload. It had thirty-eight more cases of salmon. They wrote me a note to say that due to new shipments from the States they were now in a position to send us some cocoa and skim milk powder and to let them know how much we'd like."

FOR the first time since he'd taken the witness chair the sarge glanced around the room until his eyes fell on Major Sweeney, the distinguished defendant, a swarthy officer with dark eyebrows and an expression of angelic aloofness from the matters before the court. At the moment, he was studying a sparrow on a twig outside the window. However, he swung his head around in time to meet the glance of the great Muzzle Blast and the melting look they exchanged was something like a fire winking inside an igloo. It brought the almost imperceptible softening of the lips and eyes that might assuage the features of two conspiring London dowagers who are trying to maneuver their offspring into a waltz. Here, as almost anyone could see who looked beneath the surface, was an understanding that would require all the wits of the court to overcome. Yet it was a question how many, if any, had even noticed it.

"Sergeant, I think we've been beating around the bush here long enough," Colonel Klemfous observed. "I think we should come down to the subject of how the great stream of supplies suddenly started to flow into that airport."

"Aye aye, sir. Well, sir, one day the major was standing with me near the entrance to the airport. That entrance was close to the big road that runs all the way from Noumea to the north end of the island, a distance of about two hundred and ten miles. There were a lot of trucks using that road and they were loaded down to the plimsolls with all kinds of stuff—hell, there was white pine lumber and rations and rifle ammunition and buoys and submarine net gear and artillery ammunition and PX supplies. They were all bound for different outfits that were moving in. There was nothing they didn't have. Those drivers had been making an all-day trip, or maybe a two-day trip, from Noumea over the mountain roads, and they didn't know their way very well to where they were going, and they'd always mistake the old French gates of the airport for the entrance to whatever camp they were looking for. So, all full of hope, they'd pull off the main road and drive up. It got to be an all-day routine. The driver'd jam on his brakes, stick his head out and yell at the Marine sentry:

" 'Hey, Mac, is this the Twelfth Submarine Net Depot?'

" 'Hey, Mac, is this the Hundred and Tenth Cavalry?'

" 'Hey, Mac, is this the Four Hundred and Fourteenth Amphibious Engineers?'

"The sentry's reply was always the same: 'Nope, it isn't.'

"Then the driver'd ask, 'Where the hell is it, do you know, Mac?'

" 'Nope' the sentry'd say, 'I don't.' And he didn't, either. Hell, those new outfits were swarming into New Caledonia in those days like flies around a honey pot. I felt sorry for those poor drivers. They'd have to stick her in reverse, back down to the highway and take off on another stretch.

"Now I guess Major Sweeney felt sorry for those drivers, too. He watched them come and go for a while, all loaded down so they could hardly move, and he turned to me and said, 'Maguire, it's a damn shame that all we can say to those drivers is No, No, No, all the time. Damn it, man, they're American, just like us, Maguire. They're fighting the same war. They're hot and tired just like we get every day. They've driven all the way from Noumea and just at a moment of crises in their morale, when they think they've sighted the end of their agony, we give them the big No. It isn't right, Maguire. You figure out something better. The least we can give them is a welcome and maybe a salmon sandwich and a glass of cocoa. God knows we've got plenty of both.' As we walked away from the gate the major said, kind of sad-like, 'I sure 'n hell wish this was the place they were looking for.' "

The fact that this appeared to be the crux of the testimony, insofar as it might relate to the guilt or innocence of the accused, was not lost on the members of the court. You could have heard a pin drop as the sarge paused for breath.

"Well, I got to figuring what the major said, sir, and I must say I began to get some good ideas. I take the whole responsibility for what happened. I talked it all over with Sergeant Miller, who was junior to me, and the more we talked the sorrier we got for those poor truck drivers. As a result, sir, Miller and I made some plans. The trouble was, after we reached an agreement, Miller added quite a few ideas that he'd thought up during the night. The next morning, sir, I was too late to stop what happened. I could hardly believe my eyes, sir."

The great Muzzle Blast, master of stagecraft, paused to withdraw a kahki handkerchief from his trousers. Then he applied it to his sweating face with exaggerated deliberation.

"Describe what you saw, Sergeant," ordered Colonel Klemfous.

"What I saw, sir, is pretty hard to describe. It was a Marine sentry rigged out to give what Sergeant Miller called 'A Big Amphibious Welcome.' From the way he was turned out, he might have been a soldier, he might have been a cavalryman, he might have been a paratrooper, he might have been an M. P. On his head he wore one of those tropical helmets that they issue sometimes to the Seabees and Marines, but it didn't have any emblem. On his body he wore a suit of dungarees, but they had crossed sabers painted on them in such a way that they might have been crossed cannons, or then again they might have been crossed rifles. On his arm he wore a yellow arm-band like what the Shore Patrol or the Military Police wear, but it had only one letter painted on it and that was 'P.' It might have meant Police. Or it might have meant Patrol. Or it might have meant Paratroops. Anyway, sir, with a little dust blown over him by an advancing truck, you couldn't tell whether he was French or American, friend or enemy, Marine or dogface.

"Well, I wasn't even in shouting distance of that sentry when I saw four trucks all loaded down with stuff come groaning up to the gate. The leading driver stuck his neck out and yelled at the sentry, 'Say, can you tell me how to get to the officers' mess, Twelfth Ordnance Battalion?'

"I was expecting the sentry to shout, 'No, but how about a nice glass of cold cocoa?' since that's what Miller and I had planned. But that's not what happened at all. When he gets the hail from the driver he springs to life like a bellboy in one of those New York hotels. Instead of answering the driver, he raises his arm and he steps to one side and then, like he was directing traffic in Times Square, he snaps his arm to point up our roadway, and he bellows at the truck driver: 'WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN?'

"IT WAS just like that sentry had been expecting those trucks for weeks. They took one look at him and they drove right in. I take a look down our roadway, down near the mess tent, and I see Miller wave the drivers out of their trucks by holding up some cups and rubbing his stomach and pointing into the tent like there was something worth going in for. He gets them inside. Then a Marine working party comes up and drives all the trucks away. Twenty minutes later the trucks come back as empty as the day they were made. The truck drivers, looking pretty happy to have their mission over with, get in and drive 'em away. One of them said to the sentry as he went through the gate, 'See you in a couple of days, Joe. We got a hell of a lot more stuff for you.'

"Really, Colonel, I was snowed. I was damn well snowed."

"Did you do anything to stop it, Sergeant? Did Major Sweeney do anything to stop it?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I'll tell you just what happened. I rushed over to where they were putting the stuff they had unloaded from the trucks. It was a big depression, a sort of valley, near the end of No. 2 Runway. I never saw so much stuff spread out in one layer in my life. It was rising up like the valley was going to be a peak. I tell you, sir, there was everything we needed there and I stood for a moment wondering if it wasn't an Act of God that had suddenly decided to give us everything we needed. There's no question about it, sir, whatever the delays might have been, when American supplies really start coming your way it makes you humble in the eyes of God just

to stand and watch all the things the home front can produce. Then a sudden sickening feeling told me, no, it isn't an Act of God, it's an act that can put a hell of a lot of people right in the brig.

"I rushed over to find Miller, but I didn't have to rush far. He was riding herd on eight more trucks bound for the same valley. There was enough in them to open a department store. Well, I waved him aside and I gave him hell, sir. I told him to drive those trucks right back and I told him to knock off that phony sentry. That's where Miller really got to me, sir.

"He really gave me the works. I think you ought to know, sir, that Miller's the kind of a man that when he starts selling something you've got to batten yourself down like a sailing-gig in a hurricane. He takes all your objections and hammers them into something to hook you with. When I said the stuff didn't belong to us he said, hell, it belonged to the United States Government and there weren't any better representatives in the whole Pacific. I told him it would get Major Sweeney in trouble and he shot right back at me, 'Major Sweeney's already in trouble with the brass for not getting this airport fixed up. You know what he wants is to get to Guadalcanal. He can't do it until his job here is squared away and that's where I'm trying to help him. Now if you want to see the major sweat out the war here, on account of a few technicalities, if you want to bite the fatted calf right in the nose that's laying these golden eggs, if you want to see your troops crack up on salmon and cocoa—well, I'll send all this stuff back. I'll knock off that sentry. But it seems to me you're being pretty damned disloyal to your outfit and its skipper. Why don't you ask him about it?'

"Well, sir, there's such a thing as a man being right and wrong at the same time. That's the way I felt about Miller. Anyway, I decided I'd better talk to the major about it.

"I rushed to the company tent. The major wasn't there. In another few minutes I learned he had shoved off for Noumea to see what he could do about speeding up those requisitions. I grabbed a jeep and I started after him. The road was full of truck convoys coming the other way, sir, and I never caught up to him. I didn't get to Noumea until about 2300 and I was beat up. I stayed with Sergeant Willis down there in the FIRST MAC camp and for the next two days I tried everywhere to find the major. I missed him everywhere. I thought he had gone back to Champs du Ciel.

"Well, sir, I was wrong. When I got back to the airport it looked like a mining camp. That valley near Runway No. 2 had filled up and was shooting up in the air like a brand new terrain feature and Miller couldn't find any tarpaulins big enough to cover it up. It had got to be a real hazard for the planes. The pilots there, they'd already started bragging about the number of times they'd Flown the Dump. Hell, there was all kinds of things sticking out of it, derricks, machinery, tractors, crates that had burst open with new dentist's drills poking out of them. And trucks were still coming and going. You could see the damn hill grow as you stood there staring at it. But that wasn't the thing that impressed me most, sir. It was Sergeant Miller's ingenuity in preventing waste to the Government in the case of a whole battalion of service troops.

"Those troops, under a fine man named Colonel Harmon, had been gathered in, along with everything else, by that phony sentry at the gate. I guess he made 'em believe this was the new bivouac area they were looking for. When Sergeant Miller pointed out the job that had to be done before it could be used as a bivouac area or anything else, Colonel Harmon and his men pitched right in to work. In two days, with Miller feeding them rations right out of the valley, I mean hill, they put up a Transient Officers' Mess, a barracks, a command post with a cement deck, and they were halfway through with a rack of twenty showers and a new water tank when they had to stop. It turned out that they were wanted about twenty miles up the road."

THE judge advocate waved a finger at Maguire. "Are you sure you and Sergeant Miller didn't make those service troops believe that that was their new

bivouac area, that they were, in fact, building their own new camp?"

"I'm sure I didn't, sir. Of course, I don't know what Miller told the colonel, sir. I wasn't there."

"And you say Major Sweeney wasn't there?"

"No, sir. He didn't even get back until the service troops had left."

The judge advocate waved his finger again. "Then what action, if any, did you or Major Sweeney take, when you found out what had been going on at that airport?"

"Sir, Miller had already taken action to get the property forwarded to the right outfits. He called them all up and told them he thought he knew where there was a lot of stuff they were missing. He said he wanted to know, if they'd send their trucks down and his men loaded them up, if he could keep one of everything he needed. In other words, he wanted to know if they'd let him forward all-but-one of everything. Most of them said O. K. The others gave in when Miller reminded them that the airport was operated for one and all. Their stuff was gone when the major came back."

"That, then, is how Major Sweeney got his unusual nickname, ALL-BUT-ONE?"

Sergeant Maguire cleared his throat, then looked at Major Sweeney, and then smiled wanly.

"Rightfully, sir, I think that nickname should have gone to Sergeant Miller. But the major was in command, and you know how it is, sir—they gave him the title as a sort of unit citation. After we got the place all fixed up with a big cement swimming pool, the units around there were all very proud of it. They called it, 'ALL-BUT-ONE-AIRPORT,' sir. They sort of felt they all had a part in it. They used to say it was about the only thing in the war that everyone gave everything they had to, without knowing it."

"Well," said the judge advocate, "if all this property was sent on, or most of it, as you say, why didn't you or Miller get receipts for it? Remember, Sergeant, someone signed Major Sweeney's name to $7,651,788 worth of Government property, and right there at that airport is where the trail ends. As far as the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts knows, it never went any further."

"Take my word for it, sir, most of the property was forwarded as I have described. You can prove it by finding the names of the unit commanders around there at the time and asking them. It was probably our fault, sir, but Miller and I were not men to go around collecting signed receipts. They didn't seem to mean much in those days. Not meaning any disrespect, sir, I should say this whole case was probably started by two young lieutenants in the Quartermaster's or in the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts who won't be sure whether we won the war until they have a receipt for every damned chocolate bar."

Here the Great Muzzle Blast halted and appeared to study his audience with a view to determining whether his next remarks could be uttered without serious disciplinary risk.

"If you ask me, sir," Maguire continued, "it was the first really solid move towards unification made in the early days of the war. From then on we had all we needed to improve the morale of transient travelers. Major Sweeney got to go to Guadalcanal where, as everyone knows, he did very well. And from then on there wasn't a member of any outfit who came over to that airport—I don't care whether he was Army, Navy, or Marine Corps—who didn't smile when he pulled up to those old French gates and looked at the all-Marine sentry we had there afterwards."

There was a considerable pause and rustle in the courtroom as Muzzle Blast lapsed into one of his infrequent, startling silences.

Several hands were to be observed passing across the lips of their owners among the onlookers.

"Sergeant Maguire," said Colonel Klemfous, finally, "about this man Miller whom you believe to be really entitled to the nickname, if not a lot more. Where is he stationed now?"

The sarge's eyes filled with a glow of golden reverence.

"That Miller, sir—he's a great Marine. He got the Silver Star at Peleliu, sir, but he also got shot up there a little. He's resigned now and he's running a hamburg and ice cream stand about a block

down the road from Marine Barracks, San Diego. I saw him a while back. He's doing damn well, sir. He said he might come back in for another cruise when he's sure three big changes have been made."

The sarge's pointed silence was so persuasively dramatic that Colonel Klemfous—if he had tried—could scarcely have refrained from playing the role of straight man.

"And what are those three big changes, Sergeant?"

"Miller said he might come back in when he was sure that his customers came in to get his hamburgers instead of his opinions about this and that; when the Judge Advocate General's Office stopped poking around in the past war and turned the job over to the magazines and movies; and when the Navy's statute of limitations expired in respect to certain methods used to speed the war effort. All in all, sir, he said that might be a hell of a long time off . . ."

Two weeks later the Great Muzzle Blast was back in Quantico, barking orders by day and refighting the war by night at the NCO Club, when he received a letter from Major Sweeney. It told of the major's acquittal, of his new assignment as Assistant War Plans Officer in the CNO Office in Washington, and it ended up:

> . . . and you must know how gratifying it was to me, as your former commanding officer, that you conducted yourself with such discretion on the witness stand during the late unfortunate misunderstanding. That I am grateful to you will be borne out by the fact that I am now extremely busy trying to persuade certain members of the Judge Advocate General's Office not to try you (Miller, of course, in his present civilian status, is out of the Navy's reach) for 'misappropriation of $7,651,788 worth of Government property, much of it for your own personal use, and three conspiracies to commit fraud against the Government, the country then being in a state of war.'
>
> If I fail, you may count on my support as a defense witness. I only hope I may be as helpful to you as you were to me.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Arthur J. (ALL-BUT-ONE) Sweeney,
> Major, United States Marine Corps.

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PASSAGE HOME

By LESLIE GORDON BARNARD

THEY had been shipwrecked together and now were stranded in as stinking a hole as can be found between the Java Sea and Torres Strait. For Sukey, this was less trying. He was a pretty bad smell himself—a sharp-eyed, pinch-nosed steward, Sukey was, with a glib tongue—but Joe Landor had stuck with him these last weeks, sharing good and bad alike. Sukey—who had that sort of a mind—translated such loyalty into cynical amusement and covert sneer. On the raised balcony of their dubious lodging-place, Sukey manufactured another cigarette and set it dangling from his lips. A wry smile crinkled his face.

"All right," he said. "All right. You're homesick. You want to get back to this dame. I heard it all before. Maybe you

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want me to build a ship for you, or buy a plane. Why don't you go down to the damn waterfront and whistle for one? With the right label on it. To hell with it," Sukey said, "nothing touches here that's interested in the Statue of Liberty."

BUT Landor went, as every day he went, jostled by chattering natives and shiftless whites and all the nondescripts of a half forgotten port, past the market with its alien sounds and smells, its strange bright fish and exotic fruits, its babel of languages and dialects, its heady perfumes and its odors of decay. And for the moment none of this was real to him; all this was dreaming. The reality was home—brought so near by his intense nostalgia that he was smelling the blossoms back of Mary Watkins' house, seeing the sharp sunlight on white clapboards, hearing the plaint of the saws at Coulter's Mill, the distant barking of dogs up at Coxe's Farm and the shrill voices of the kids going to the schoolhouse where Mary would be teaching them, perhaps from the big colored map on the wall, the far magic of Borneo and Celebes, the Indies and the Coral Sea. Below him in a sprawling harbor lay a clutter of junks and praus, a tramp or two at anchor, two others edged against a rickety deep-water pier. He stared, because one of these was newly in. One look at her, and he was tempted to the madness of running in the tropical brightness.

She looked like home, this ship—smelly old tramp though she was, with the signatures of the seven seas upon her. And, standing there in his makeshift clothes, his tousle of straw-colored hair matted with sweat, Joe Landor regarded her with something close to idolatry, though as yet he dared not hope.

Of a deckhand languidly polishing brass he asked, "When does she sail, buddy?"

"Tonight."

"Where to?"

"San Francisco. Panama. New York."

"Look," Joe Landor said after a moment when he fought for control, "how's chances? I'd give my right arm to come along."

The fellow looked doubtful.

"Not a steward by any chance?"

"No, but—"

"Cap'n's looking for one."

"Is he aboard?"

"No."

"Where can I find him?"

The sailor grinned. He began to polish more vigorously.

"Coming now. That's him in the white suit. But I warn you he's a character, the Old Man is!"

A dilapidated conveyance had drawn up on the rickety pier. Out of it creaked the fattest man Joe Landor had seen outside a Midway. His suit, white by courtesy, was wrinkled like an elephant's hide; on his massive head was a pith helmet whose inadequacy was countered by an under-thatching of great withering green leaves. Elephant fashion, too, he set one foot before the other cautiously exploring the weakness and strength of the wharf, and wheezed up the gangplank, disappearing into a forward cabin through mosquito-netted doors.

"That's him!" said the deck hand. "A character. Captial C for Character. Want to ask him?"

The idea of intruding on such mammoth magnificence turned Landor cold.

"Sure," he said. "Will he—see me?"

"See anybody," the deckhand said. "Democratic—but droll. Don't say I didn't warn you."

Seated imposingly in an oversize chair chained to the floor behind an untidy desk, the captain looked even more like a strange god whose nod meant death or life. Everywhere about him—hanging on the walls, speared to the woodwork, captured in racks—were souvenirs; odd knives and shells and knick-knacks, and some things beautifully wrought in silver, and at least two objects which, however shrunken and cured might once have adorned human necks. Serving a more utilitarian purpose some of these curios served the purpose of preventing papers on the untidy desk from being scattered by the violent gyrations of two electric fans continuously in operation. To the Presence, Joe Landor made a stammering plea. Nothing happened. No sound, apart from the whirring of the fans, the grampus-like breathing of the captain and the far complaint of a

winch, rewarded or rebuked him. Then the fat man's hand reached out and one sausage-like finger fondled with a caressing motion a small and lovely replica of a native temple wrought in silver.

"So you wish to sail with us?" inquired the captain.

"I want to get to New York, sir."

"My lord," said the captain, "why in the world?"

"I can get a train home from there."

"Oh." The fat man seemed comforted. He said, "I shall not leave the ship. Risked myself in the damned subway once. Held up traffic for an hour." His eyes twinkled, deep in the puffy flesh.

"I—there's a girl waiting for me, sir," Landor said eagerly.

"Women," said the captain. "Oh lord!"

"She's—"

"They all are when you're away from 'em. Why'd you leave her?"

"To—to see the world."

The captain's face registered great pain.

"To see the world," he repeated slowly. "And now you want to go home. To marry this girl?"

"Yes, sir."

The captain said hopefully, "Maybe there's another fellow by now. No? . . . Well, it's your look out . . . I suppose you got wind somehow we could do with a steward? Fellow I had deserted ship last place we touched at; only missed him after we sailed. Took a pair of binoculars, a damn nice head I got from Borneo, and my best trousers. What for, lord only knows; little shrimp could fall right through either leg. Never should've trusted the fellow." He prodded a pendulous lower lip doubtfully, and stared at Joe Landor. "How do I know about you, huh?"

"I can promise, sir—"

"Don't! *He* did. Wouldn't believe the Angel Gabriel now. Any experience?"

"Not as a steward, sir, but—"

"Bad," said the captain.

"Please, sir—"

"Well, I'll think it over. Can't say mor'n that. Go away now. Come back about five, if you like. I can't promise anything mind you. Might find somebody meantime. Experienced. Can't make any promises now. Don't stand there! Go away!"

SUKEY, reclining on the skeleton of a chair on the raised balcony of their dubious lodging, listened languidly; then he said, "Suppose this fat character gives you the brush-off when you go back?" and Joe Landor said, a catch in his breath, "When you want a thing as bad as that you've just got to get it. There mightn't be another chance like this for months." Sukey nodded. He eyed this tousle-haired youth for whom a girl at home was waiting, and wondered at his innocence.

"Just when do you see this character again?" Sukey asked.

"He said five o'clock."

"And meantime?"

"I'll hang around and keep my fingers crossed," Landor said.

Sukey nodded. "Well, good luck," he grinned. "Me, I've got to drift up street and see a guy I ran into. Wants me to heave a drink or two with him. Be seeing you."

Sukey eased himself down the rickety steps, the narrow street receiving and soon hiding him from Landor's view. In the briefest time the tropical heat allowed him, he was negotiating at the gangplank with a languid seaman who betrayed interest only when Sukey injected the persuasions of his own professional status.

"Better talk to the Old Man," the sailor said.

The captain was in his cabin, a lethargic mountain of flesh who for a long time eyed the intruder, for Sukey a painful interlude.

"Experienced steward, huh?" the captain said at last.

"Yes, sir. Seventeen years' service."

The captain nodded.

"Take a chair," he said. "Be with you in a few minutes." Ponderously rising, he lumbered out, and the mosquito nettting at the doors fell into place behind him. Left alone Sukey started his shrewd eyes on an appraisal of the cabin and its contents, a roving glance that missed nothing and came to focus at last on the captain's desk, its charts and documents and personal papers held against the electrically-induced air currents by souvenirs, simple and grotesque, performing the useful role of paper-

weights. Held down by a beautifully wrought replica of a native temple was a paper folded over and marked on the outside in a gargantuan scrawl, *Questions to ask Applicants for Steward's Berth,* at which Sukey stared, eyes lidded.

He guessed he should be able to answer any questions. Seventeen years a steward; he should know all the answers. He grinned, thinking of Joe Landor. If the damn young fool had shut his mouth he might have copped this and got home to the girl who waited. Sukey shrugged. He was thinking of home, too; of Broadway and the Bowery and a lot of other places he could do with, but with the superiority of a man who would never be trapped into loyalty to any one female. Desire grew in him sharply. There must be no miss-up, no slip, no shadow of a doubt. Tonight he, Sukey, must sail in this ship for home . . .

Up on the rickety balcony of their lodging-house, desire for home grew also in Joe Landor. Hope quarrelled with a sick fear that would not be pushed aside. When he closed his eyes he could see Mary's face, Mary's smile—and the loneliness she had not managed to hide. Because he had been just too young to make the Navy in the war, Mary had understood how it was with him, and that he must have his chance to see the world. Now, he thought, he would give the whole known world—its sprawling continents and far islands and rolling seas—for the sight of her face, the feel of her embrace. He had to tell himself, "Listen, punk, you mustn't count on this fat character taking you. Anything may happen,"—not then knowing, in his innocence, his betrayal to the shrewd and plausible Sukey. Sukey he thought to be up the street drinking with a chance companion, which would have been quite in character.

AT WELL before five he set out. Once in motion towards his goal he felt better. The prayer in his heart seemed sure to be answered; but he walked like a man in a dream, the alien sounds and sights endurable only because of the hope that lay in a smelly tramp steamer berthed at the pier below.

The sailor he had before encountered was on duty at the gangplank and recognized him.

"Back again, buddy?" he said.

There was something odd about the way he spoke and looked, as if he were half amused or half pitying. But he made no comment, gave no indication. That was for the Old Man. He called a boy who conducted Joe Landor to the captain's quarters. Rumblings in the bowels of the ship and activities on deck spoke of last minute ladings, of an early sailing. They seemed to vibrate against Joe Landor's nerve-ends. His lips felt dry. San Francisco. Panama. New York!

In the cabin the electric fans still oscillated wildly.

"Take a seat," the boy said. "Cap'n will be here in a little while."

Something in the boy's look might have warned Landor, a look not unlike that on the deck hand's face, but wiped off like a sponged slate the moment Joe Landor detected it.

The boy left and Joe was alone. Alone with the curios from many lands, the garnerings of a man who had known the adventure and the loneliness of the seven seas; alone with the whirring fans, with a buzzing fly of a poisonous blue-green color, with papers gently agitated on the captain's desk but held in place by more of his souvenirs, with one paper that inescapably claimed attention. Folded under the exquisite replica of a native temple the captain's great scrawling handwriting still drew the eyes, *Questions to ask Applicants for Steward's Berth.* Questions? What questions, Joe Landor wondered. He sat staring at the paper. His heart beat suffocatingly. If only he knew. . .

Seven minutes later there was a wheezing sound, the mosquito netting was drawn aside by a huge hamlike hand, and the captain's bulk crowded the entrance.

Joe Landor sprang up. He stood before the captain sharply at attention. All his heart hunger, his nostalgia, was in his eyes. The captain missed nothing of it, and an ironic humor shaped the expression on his face. One big finger prodded at a pendulous lower lip.

"Well, son," he said, "a funny thing

happened not long after you left here." He cocked a quizzical eye at Landor. "A chap turned up who was a qualified steward. Seventeen years' experience. So you see it was him against you. . ."

The deckhand grinned as Joe Landor left the ship. The boy grinned, too, and man and boy exchanged glances. They knew. They knew by the look on Joe Landor's face.

Natives—Eurasians, Europeans, men, women and children—all stared too at the young fellow with the tousle of straw-colored hair who ran through the crowds like a man gone suddenly amok. Some of them cursed him, but he did not care. He ran on, reaching the narrow street, reaching the balcony of their dubious lodging. And there was Sukey, before whom Landor halted breathless, unable at first to get breath for any words. Sukey, the sharp-eyed, pinch-nosed steward, trading glance for glance with the lad who had stuck with him these weeks since the shipwreck. A cigarette dripped from one corner of Sukey's thin lips. An insolent defiance dared Landor to go ahead and make his accusation of betrayal.

His eyes seemed to be saying, "You were a damned fool to tell me about the chance you had. I got a feel for New York and the bright lights, too." Then Joe Landor got his breath enough to speak. Slowly the defiance in Sukey's face altered. The kid made no accusation. Maybe he thought there were other experienced stewards adrift in this stinking port. Could be, at that; but it didn't matter now to Sukey if Landor knew the truth or not. The thing was done. It could not now be undone. Alien sounds struck up at them from the street with its polyglot traffic against which imagination sharply and poignantly set the inviting familiarities of home.

Sukey's face, as he listened to the words that spilled from young Joe Landor, would have done credit to any poker game.

"And there was this paper on his desk, Sukey," Landor said. "It was folded over and held down by one of this fat character's souvenirs—a sort of native temple. He'd scrawled on the outside so big you couldn't miss it, *Questions to Ask Applicants for Steward's Berth*, and, boy, did my fingers itch to get hold of it. But of course I wasn't going to snoop that way." Joe Landor grinned. "Was it ever lucky I kept my hands off it! Because it was just a blank paper after all. This fat character I'm to play steward to between here and little old New York is a bit of a joker all right. It was a test—a trap, Sukey. What d'ye suppose would've happened if I'd been prying fool enough to lift that pretty little temple off and have a look?"

Sukey allowed a drift of smoke to fog his eyes.

"Bells," he said. "Temple bells like a damned musical box that starts playing when you lift it. Temple bells you could hear all over the forepart of the ship—and the bum's rush for you!"

Joe Landor stared incredulously at his companion.

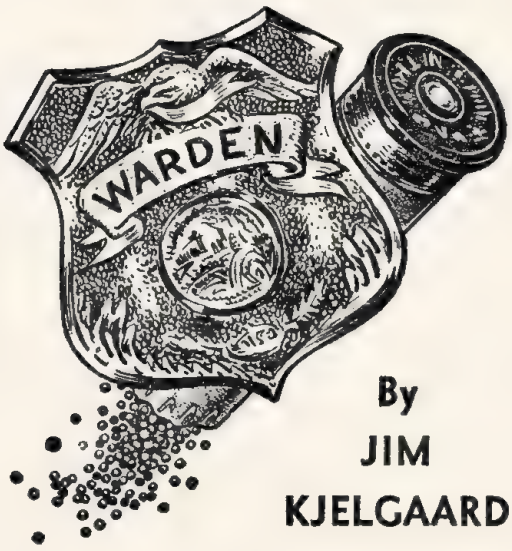
He said slowly, "Gee, Sukey—how did you know?"

Sukey flipped the end of his cigarette into the street below causing an inebriated gentleman passing by to curse with vehemence.

"Maybe I've seen a gadget like that somewhere," he said. "Maybe I'm just a swell guesser," Sukey said, and added, not without bitterness, "or am I?"

ILLUSTRATED BY
PETER KUHLHOFF

CHARLEY HOE HANDLE'S CHICKEN PARTY



By
JIM
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EVER since he became warden of Stick County, Horse Jenkins' main ambition had been to slap Charley Hoe Handle behind bars. And finally the chance was dropped in his lap so clean that there just wasn't no missin'. Charley Hoe Handle, the slickest poacher what ever crawled through a thicket, was his meat!

Stick is a big county, with almost everything in it. There's evergreen forests big enough to hide a dozen armies, and a lot of hardwoods too. There's lakes, rivers, streams, a few hills, and along the north border, near the Stannica River, there is also the Stannica Meadows.

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They're natural meadows, long enough so it would be all a man wanted to do to walk their length in a day, and about half as wide as they are long. Most places they're grown up to weeds, with a few patches of short grass in between. Except for some beaver, what dammed the little streams leadin' into the Stannica and ate the stragglin' aspens what grew along the river, the meadows didn't have any game what anybody knowed about.

That is, nobody knowed of none until Horse Jenkins made a patrol along the river, and the idea he had in mind was that some scoundrel like Charley Hoe Handle might be poachin' the beaver.

The beaver was all right, chewin' away at the aspens along the bank and havin' a good time all by themselfs. Horse was just amblin' along, with nothin' special on his mind except that when he come to an old tumbledown barn in the middle of the meadows he would cut back to his car, when somethin' busted out of the short grass right ahead of him and flew into the weeds. It was followed by somethin' else, and then somethin' more, and then still somethin' more, while Horse just stood with his tongue in his cheek and his heart poundin' like an air hammer.

For a minute he didn't believe what he saw, but when he sloshed into the tall weeds there they went again. There was seven of 'em, and they jumped into the air one right after the other as they flew farther into the weeds, and anybody who knowed how tough Horse Jenkins could be wouldn't of believed what he was thinkin' and feelin' then.

He sat down right in the weeds, his eyes like a little kid's and a sort of smile on his mouth. Horse had been a warden for twenty-five of his forty-six years, and it was 'most fifteen years ago when he had last saw a prairie chicken. Yet, here was seven! He had saw them hisself!

Twenty-five years ago Horse Jenkins had started in the warden business on a kind of high-flyin' notion. His idea was that, no matter how many people there might be, there was still room for fish and game. Twenty-five years had taught him that wardens have to fight like hell to keep that fish and game. They had to be hard as railroad rails, and they couldn't even trust their own brother.

Yet, while he sat there, part of Horse's old dream come back. For a long while he had been troubled about the Stannica Meadows. It was a barren part of his territory, a place that had nothin' at all except a few beaver. Horse had worried a lot about it, but he didn't know what else he could do.

Now he knew. The Stannica Meadows was made to order for prairie chickens and there was seven in them. He didn't know where they'd come from, only that they were there. If they could be left to increase. . . . The whole state had had a closed season on chickens for eleven years. But they had been plentiful once and could be again if—if only people like Charley Hoe Handle didn't find them.

Horse knowed as only a warden can know that most hunters and fishermen are decent people who abide by the law. He knowed also that there was some as didn't know no law, and that kind would shoot anything as long as they could take game home. The best he could do was keep his mouth shut about what he'd found.

He went back to his office at Beaver Junction, and it was just six days later when George Dulish, a Stick County trapper, busted in.

"Horse," says George, "there's prairie chickens back in the Stannica Meadows! And I saw Charley Hoe Handle shootin' at 'em!"

FOR a minute, too petrified to do anything else, Horse Jenkins just sat. It was different if Charley Hoe Handle poached a deer now and again, or got himself a mess of fish when he felt like it, or done other things. Stick County had plenty of everything except prairie chickens. There was only seven of them, and in those seven lay whatever hope Stick County had of ever havin' chicken shootin' again. Each bird was worth a hundred deer. For a minute Horse felt kind of hopeless.

"Does anybody else know about them?" he asked George Dulish.

"Oh yes," says George. "It's pretty well noised around that there's chickens back

in the Stannica Meadows and quite a few people are s'posed to be huntin' 'em. But I saw Charley Hoe Handle shoot at 'em. I saw it myself!"

"Thanks for the tip," says Horse Jenkins.

He was mad now, as mad as he ever got. Any kind of outlaw was bad enough, but anybody who would shoot at the last seven prairie chickens in Stick County wasn't just an outlaw. He was somethin' lower, somethin' what just didn't have no name. Charlie Hoe Handle was. . . He was. . . Even Horse Jenkins felt sick to his stomach when he tried to think of the right thing. Still, if Charley Hoe Handle was after them chickens he was goin' to get 'em. And, is so much as one feather was ruffled, Horse was goin' to get Charley Hoe Handle.

Horse drove out to the Meadows at night, cuttin' the lights on his car and easin' it into the old barn. He laid there all night, and the first light of mornin' was just seepin' through the cracks in the boards when, far off, he heard a shotgun boom three times. Horse wormed towards the place, usin' all the Injun stuff he knew. Anybody had a legal right to cross the Stannica Meadows with a shotgun, but if they shot, it was at chickens. There wasn't no other shotgun game.

About ten o'clock Horse heard another shotgun crack, and stalked that place. Still Charley Hoe Handle lived up to his reputation. He wasn't anywheres around, though towards evenin' Horse thought he saw the old Injun sneakin' into the brush. The next day a shotgun—Horse knowed it was the same one on account it had the same sound—boomed again. Again Horse couldn't get next to who was doin' the shootin', and that night he slept in the old barn.

The next mornin' he woke up at daybreak, and glued his eye to a crack. Five minutes later he saw them seven chickens sail out of the weeds and land in the short grass not forty feet away.

Horse looked at 'em, and it was like he'd been carryin' a ton of brick what had all to once fell off his shoulders. There was still seven chickens, but they showed by their actions that they had been hunted. They ducked and flitted around, always on the watch and nervous as trapped deer. They . . .

Neither Horse nor the chickens saw Charley Hoe Handle come to the edge of the weeds and stand up. He had a twelve-gauge pump gun in his hands, and only a Injun could of got so close to anything as wary as them chickens without scarin' 'em. Even so, as soon as they saw Charley, the chickens pounded into the air. Charley Hoe Handle raised his gun and shot three times.

Horse rubbed his eyes and looked again when he saw the chickens set their wings and sail right towards a party of four more shotgun hunters comin' across the meadows. It couldn't be so, Charley Hoe Handle didn't miss. But he had missed. Horse slipped his gun out of its holster and ran around the barn. Charley was just standin' there, lookin' towards where the chickens had flew.

"All right, Charley," says Horse. "I've got you this time. Come on over."

"Yup," says Charley Hoe Handle. "You got me this time."

Horse stood still, not knowin' what to do or say, because things just shouldn't work out like this. Charley, bein' who he was, ought to have some trick up his sleeve. A little goshawk, disturbed by the four hunters, came dodgin' across the meadow. Horse looked towards the hunters, and saw the spooky chickens flush far out of their range. The dodgin' little hawk swerved. Charlie Hoe Handle raised his gun, shot, and the hawk came down. Charley grinned.

"It takes a Injun to get close to chickens," says he. "In the past six days I've had anyhow thirty shots at that flock. I reckon they'll be left for breedin'."

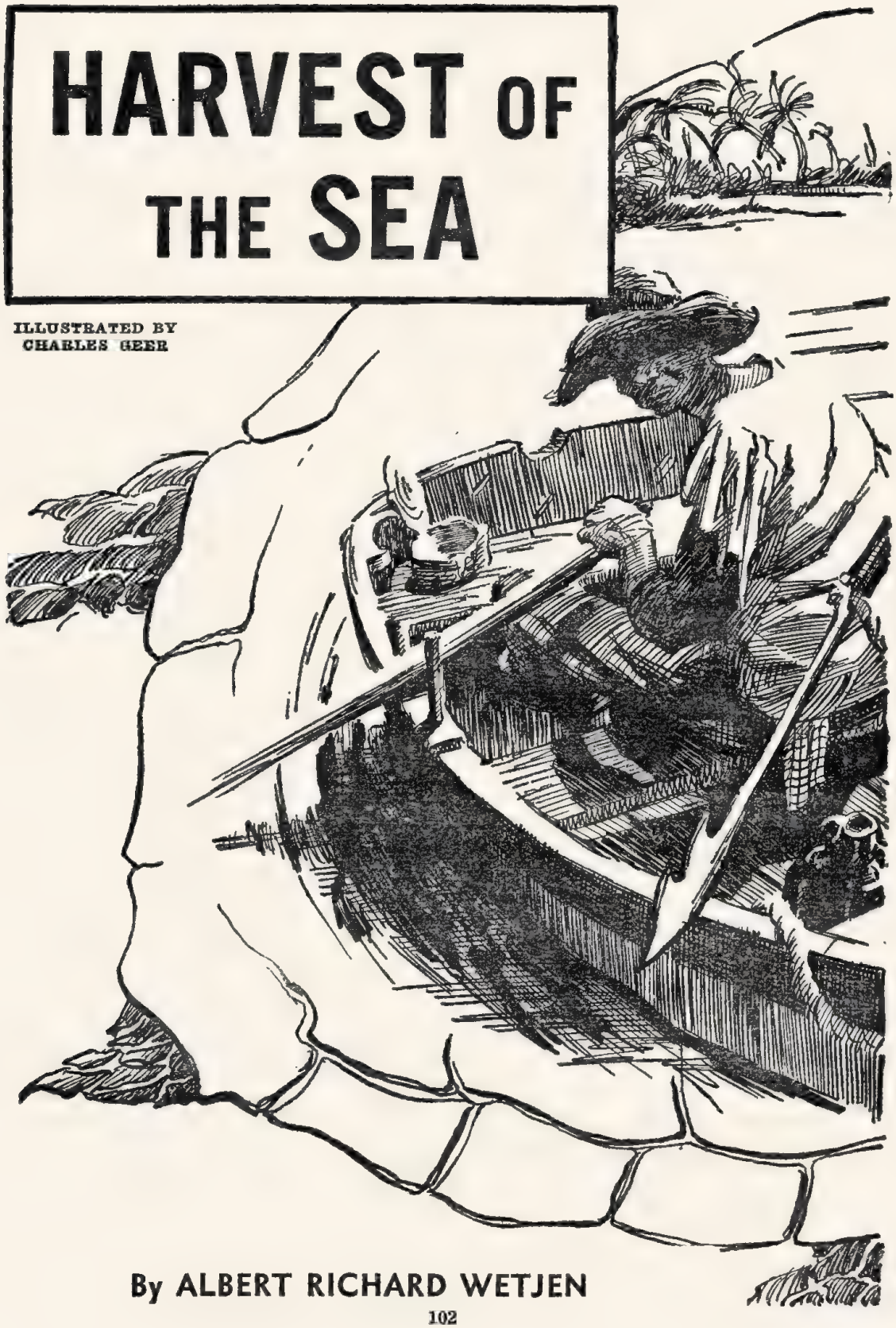
"Yes," says Horse, who had saw the goshawk drop and who had knowed then that he and a Injun poacher might have exactly the same idea but work it out in different ways. "Yes," says he, knowin' that, even if they was planned misses, thirty shots fired at any flock of chickens would make 'em fly out of range of ordinary hunters, "I reckon they will be left."

He grinned at Charley Hoe Handle. "I've hunted you for God knows how many years and finally—finally. . . Get in the car, Charley.

"Finally the beer's on me."

HARVEST OF THE SEA

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES GEER



By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

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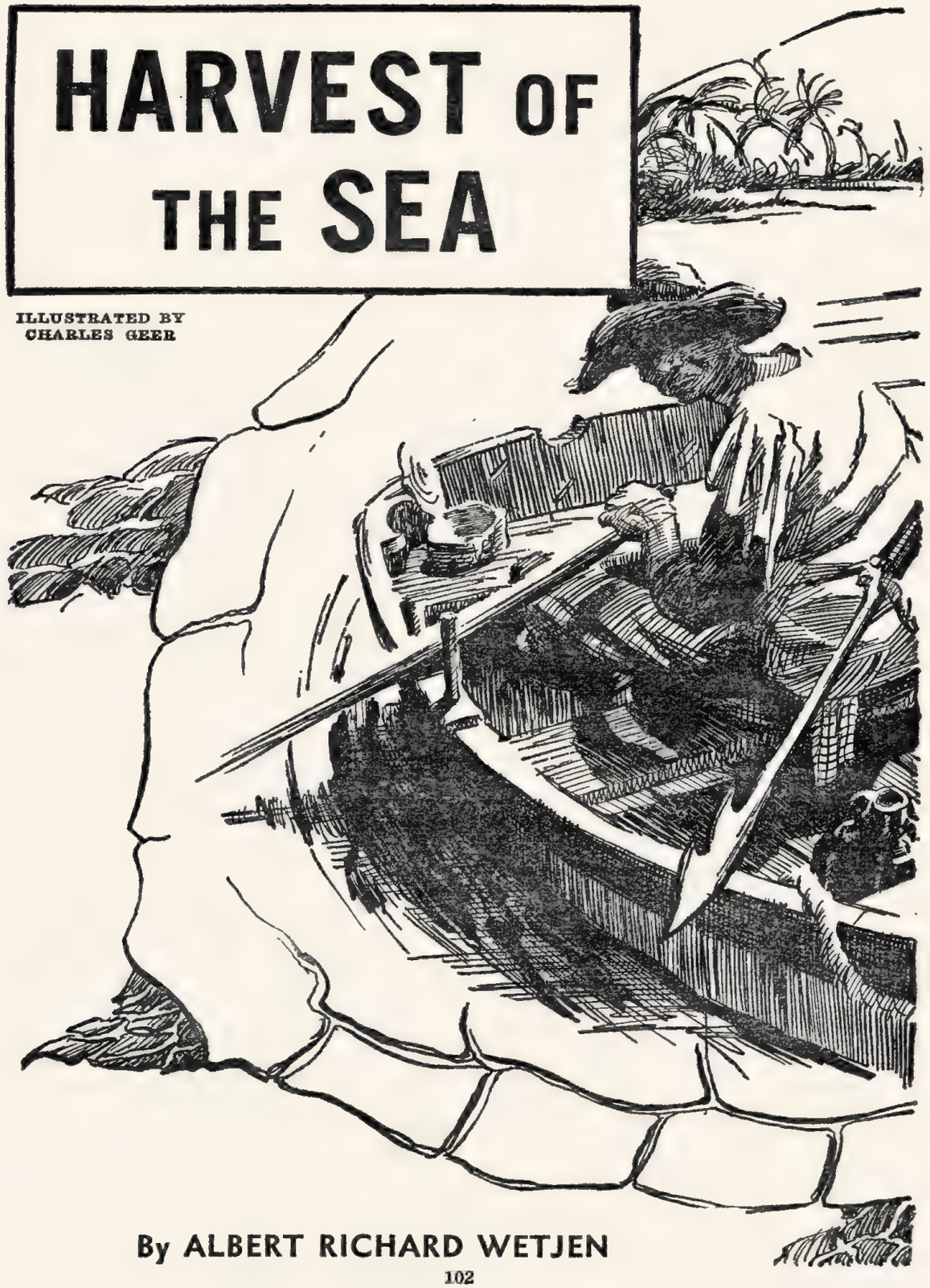

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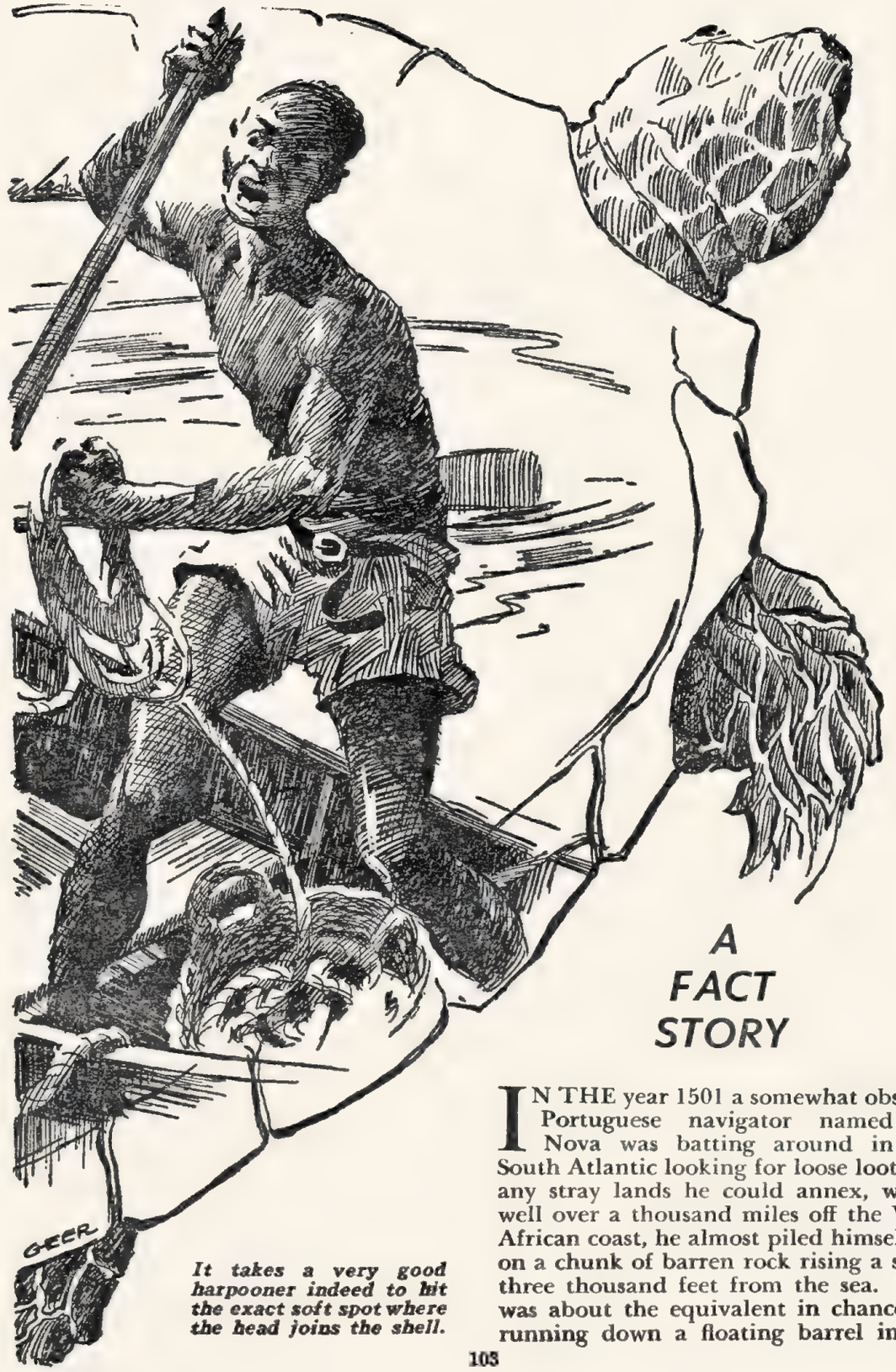

It takes a very good harpooner indeed to hit the exact soft spot where the head joins the shell.

A FACT STORY

IN THE year 1501 a somewhat obscure Portuguese navigator named da Nova was batting around in the South Atlantic looking for loose loot and any stray lands he could annex, when, well over a thousand miles off the West African coast, he almost piled himself up on a chunk of barren rock rising a sheer three thousand feet from the sea. This was about the equivalent in chances to running down a floating barrel in the

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middle of Lake Superior, because that chunk of rock is sometimes hard to find even when you know where it is, which da Nova certainly didn't.

It was a pretty sad discovery, anyway, after his weeks of cruising. He found some good springs on top of the plateau, a few patches of grass and some scattered shrubs, but the only living things were the hordes of sea birds that came ashore to nest. So da Nova did not trouble to do any annexing, but being a devout man and the discovery having been made on Holy Thursday, he named the rock Ascension Island and went on his way to blunder into the much larger and more fertile island of St. Helena over seven hundred miles to the south. These two specks on the chart are the only landfalls you will make on the long run from Cape Town to the Canaries.

In any event Ascension Island was left pretty much to itself save for rare visits from ships wanting fresh water. Two hundred years after da Nova, the notorious pirate and explorer, William Dampier, was wrecked on the northern coast and having more time to look around than most of the others he found the numerous sandy beaches of the island to be the haunt of swarms of giant greenback sea-turtles who came ashore to lay their eggs. This was fortunate and enabled the shipwrecked men to pull through on a diet of sea birds and turtle until they were rescued. But Dampier had the same opinion of Ascension as da Nova had. He wanted no part of it and was glad to get away. It drowsed along as before for another hundred years until the battle of Waterloo had been fought.

Then the British, with Napoleon on their hands, looked around for a good place to put him on ice and decided on St. Helena. At the same time it seems to have dawned on them that Ascension was of strategic importance and could be very usefully built up into a sort of South Atlantic Gibraltar. The navy took it over, manned it with sailors and marines, named it officially H.M.S. Ascension and put it in shape. It is probably the only island in the world classified as a warship and run as a warship. And since all supplies have to be shipped in, it became a regular port of call for vessels on the Cape to London run and the turtles suddenly became valuable.

WHEN I first heard the mate tell the bosun, "You'd better get a derrick rigged. We're loading turtles at Ascension in the morning," the news seemed slightly fantastic. I'd already been shipmates with everything from creosote to copra, Brahma cattle to fertilizer bones, but turtles were something distinctly new. First off I couldn't imagine anyone ordering a shipment of turtles, and second the idea of a derrick being raised seemed to mean we were going to load turtles by the ton. We were, of course, but not as I imagined—my idea of turtles at that time being confined strictly to the pond-size variety. So my first view of the big boys was something of a shock.

There were no docking facilities at Ascension, though for that matter we never stayed long enough to make docking necessary. We hove to off the coast, as close in as the sea condition would permit, and sun-burned, bearded sailors dressed any old way would pull out in whaleboats. They took the mail sacks, the newspapers we'd saved for them, and some light supplies. Then a big lighter would come out, towed by a big launch, and on this, flippers waving but helpless on their backs, were the turtles. There were about ten on my first occasion and they took up most of the lighter so those of the crew who had never seen such things before were as pop-eyed as I was.

We started out by hoisting a specimen that was at least four feet long and must have weighed close to four hundred pounds. No wonder we needed a derrick, for some of the others that followed were even larger. The carapace, or shell, of all of them could literally have been used as a small bath-tub. In exceptional cases these fantastic reptiles are said to tip the beam at a thousand pounds and grow well over five feet in length. The average specimens we took from Ascension on several trips seldom reached more than half that weight and about a foot less in length, but that's still a hell of a lot of turtle.

We had already prepared a large, loose canvas tank which was half-filled with water, and into this we dumped our

queer cargo, right side up as they couldn't get out anyway. They'd flounder around for a while, then subside and sometimes lay completely motionless for days. They took almost all one side of the foredeck and every morning when we washed down, we'd slosh the hose over them and half-fill the tank again. This was considered quite a concession to humanity, for in the old days they were simply dumped on deck upside down and their flippers would be spiked to the planking to prevent them from being washed overside in bad weather. They were invariably consigned to the big London hotels, to Buckingham Palace or the Lord Mayor on the occasion of some special banquet, and so were considered very special cargo indeed and treated with consideration.

They were no treat however to the old time whalers, who often took them by the dozens, dumped them in their holds and kept them there for months to be used as fresh meat when required, without any fussing about washing them down now and then or worrying about breaking their flippers when crowded so together. The turtles seem indifferent to pain or discomfort, as a matter of fact, and able to go without food indefinitely, and their tenacious hold on life is almost incredible.

I have seen them in the islands where natives had hauled them up the beach, turned them over and left them for weeks, until their eyes literally hung out like stalks while the tropic sun made their under shell almost too hot to touch. The crabs or the gulls would usually take care of the eyes, but none of this seemed to bother the turtles much. At least they were always alive and ready when the cooks needed them, and if you levered over the deadest looking one you could find it took only a second or two to come to life and start floundering instinctively back towards the sea.

Until very recent times little was known of the habits and living conditions of the green-back turtle, or of other deep-sea turtles, though it would be truer to say a great deal was known but by the wrong people. Sailors on tramp sailing vessels, whalers, sealers, Kanakas, Seychelle Islanders and natives of the West Indies and of the north Australian coast knew a lot, but they were hardly the kind to write books on the subject, make accurate observations or give lectures. So as far as most of the world was concerned, including the biologists, the deep-sea turtle was much of a mystery. It was not even known for a long time what they ate, as no one ever bothered to try and feed them in captivity and anyhow they never seemed hungry. It has been established now, of course, that while all other marine turtles are carnivorous, living on fish, crabs and small molluscs, the green turtle is strictly vegetarian, and whether this has anything to do with it or not it is the best eating of the whole tribe and makes the best soup.

As an instance of the complete ignorance as regards turtles, often going to the extent of frank disbelief that such sea giants existed, there is the story of Louis de Rougemont, which by now is practically Australian folk-lore. I had previously come across various mentions of this adventurous Frenchman, tall, thin, sad-faced and with a drooping mustache, but the following incident was new to me. I had it from a retired skipper of the grain fleet who was drinking double rums with beer chasers in the bar of Menzies Hotel in Melbourne and claimed that as a youth he had been present when the incident ocurred. The story was verified by the editor of Australia's Geographic Magazine, so I give it with assurance.

OVER fifty years ago Louis de Rougemont for some reason (probably shipwreck) was forced to spend a considerable time living with the aboriginals of the northern coast tribes, and very naturally he saw a lot of curious things. When he finally got back to Melbourne and civilization, he told such obvious "whoppers" he was a nine day wonder in the press, and such yarns as saving his life by sticking a double-pointed stick upright in the jaws of an attacking shark, watching blacks practically run up straight-trunked coconut palms with the agility of monkeys, seeing a fish that climbed trees, and a large sea slug that, when attacked, poured out all its internal organs for

the attacker to make a meal of while the slug crawled into a hole to grow a new set of insides, were good for some very pungent jokes indeed. In those days, of course, and indeed right up until the last war, the average Australian knew about as much of the northern tropical part of his continent as the average American knows about life round Hudson's Bay.

In any event de Rougemont was a sensation and Harry Richards, then manager of the Tivoli Theatre in Melbourne, lined him up to give a lecture on his experiences. Which was a slight error. There was an audience all right. They wanted to see what this funny maniac looked like and they were all set to put him in his place. Attired in evening clothes Harry Richards had dug up for him, the sad-looking Frenchman stepped on the stage and began, very earnestly: "I would like to tell you of my experiences in riding turtles . . ." That was as far as he got. The lecture lasted thirty seconds. He had this time gone too far. As one man, the audience yelled to know what the hell he thought they were; what was he trying to give them? Pandemonium broke loose, with hoots, whistles and stamping of feet and the word "Liar!" was the mildest hurled at the unfortunate speaker. The uproar was getting worse when Harry Richards rushed out and grabbing his astonished protege by the arm shouted, "For God's sake come off! They'll wreck the bloody theatre!" And de Rougemont came off, probably wondering if maybe the audience wasn't right and his long sojourn with the northern tribes hadn't cracked something in his head.

But since that disastrous night at the Tivoli, so many pictures of bathing beauties riding turtles have been published in the Australian press no one pays the matter much attention anymore. And the facts are that natives can practically run up coconut palms; there *is* a tree-climbing fish, and also the sea-slug, the *bêche-de-mer* of trade, does deliver its entrails as a bribe to escape, are no longer news. Everything de Rougemont claimed has been fully vindicated. The main trouble was he talked a generation too soon and before the wrong people. If he'd mentioned his wonders before the pearlers and the trading captains ashore for a spree on Thursday Island or in Port Darwin they would only have been mildly astonished that a man should take the trouble to think such obvious things were worth talking about, the turtle riding especially, as most of them in their time had put bets on which of their blacks or Kanakas could stay with their sea-going mount the longest without falling off their backs.

About the only ability required for riding turtles (aside from catching one first) is an athletic capacity to remain on top of the huge, slippery, domed shell. The creatures are not vicious. Their main ambition is to get the hell away as fast as possible and about the only danger to the rider, aside from getting half drowned with the frantic twisting and diving, is if he should by some miracle find time to stick his hand over the turtle's snout, in which case he might possibly lose that hand. These reptiles have no teeth but their tight-fitting, sharp-edged horny jaws can come together with power enough to sheer through a stout stick or even a small iron bar, though their sole normal use is to crop the sea grasses on which the greenback feeds. Less agile customers, instead of trying to ride the shell, make a line fast to each of the fore flippers and holding these like reins just sit comfortably back in the water and get towed hither and yon or up and down until satisfied. Maybe de Rougemont would have mentioned that too if he'd only been given more time.

When your gourmet in New York or San Francisco sits down to his dish of turtle soup, and possibly to a turtle steak (which tastes somewhat like veal) he is probably quite unaware that what to him is an expensive luxury is the common dish of countless thousands of natives all over the world. In the South seas, for instance, turtle is about the only fresh meat that decorates the Kanaka menu on hundreds of islands. It is an important staple, sometimes the most important, as seal and whale are to the Eskimo and bananas to the Kaffir. The well-being, and in some cases the actual survival, of many an island's inhabitants hinges upon the turtle catch each year,

so of necessity the Kanaka had to learn their habits and their seasons if they wanted to eat.

Turtles may be taken most of the year round on most any good sandy beach at extra high tides, when the females come ashore to lay their eggs. There are some periods when only a few appear and others when they literally come abeach by hundreds and even thousands. It was thought for a long time that only the females ever left the sea, but it is now believed the males sometimes do also, though for what reason is obscure. Possibly in the carnivorous species it is to rout out and eat the eggs, or to snap up the new-hatched turtles as they scurry for the sea before the gulls and sharks take their toll. From egg time to maturity the turtle is fair game for anything that happens to be hungry and it is estimated that scarcely one in a hundred ever reaches the comparative safety of the heavy-weights with their all but impregnable armor of hard shell.

Even these do not seem entirely safe. I had always thought that a turtle once grown was immune to everything save man, but possibly not. The turtle's brother, the land tortoise, is so constructed that it can, when threatened or when ready to sleep, withdraw all its limbs and its head completely into the carapace, so presenting to any intruder nothing to gnaw on. The turtle does not have this ability. It can withdraw its head a trifle, and it can flatten its tough and scaly flippers close to its sides but they still remain pregnable. And apparently they are sometimes subject to attack by sharks, though it would have to be a pretty well famished shark who would want to tackle the job. In any event I have seen turtles with a flipper missing.

A very close friend of mine who lives on one of the myriad islands of the Great Barrier Reef off the east Australian coast, a favorite swarming place for turtles, told me he sometimes took one with a big chunk missing in the shell. This almost certainly must be an old injury and probably done when the animal was not yet full grown and toughened up, for I doubt if even a tiger shark could get its teeth into the armor of a whopping four hundred pounder.

THERE is no great skill required in catching a female turtle who is bent on an egg-laying mission. Once out of the water these animals are practically helpless, move awkwardly, and make little or no atempt to escape. They can be pried over with any sort of stout lever and left helpless until required. Your South Seas Kanaka has an easy time stocking his larder when egg-laying time is in full swing. When this slackens off he really has to hustle and hunt the turtle in its native element, running it down by canoe and either spearing or harpooning it, though occasionally one may be spotted asleep on top of the water and eased up and roped before it knows what has happened.

However, the prime turtle season in the islands (apart from the nesting months) lies between November and December in what is called the "salwal" or mating period, as during this process the turtles make not slightest effort to escape or evade capture though at sea where, normally, they are tricky and fast and easily scared into panic-stricken flight. During the salwal no chase or caution is necessary. The turtles couple in the water, lie in that condition anywhere from ten to fifteen hours at a time and are utterly oblivious of anything save the business in hand. The sun-sheen on the carapaces of the amorous pair drifting on the swell is like a morse lamp sending its message for miles around, and the ever watchful Kanakas have their canoes out promptly. On some islands special lookouts are kept stationed in the palm tops during the mating period, ready to yell and point as soon as the betraying flash comes across the miles of ocean. Sometimes, if an island is very lucky, there will be several canoes in the water at the same time and they will be busy all day, and even by moonlight, bringing home the harvest of the sea.

The hunting canoe slides alongside the blissfully unconscious quarry, a Kanaka jumps overside with a strong hook and line, and since the female is considered by far the choicer eating the male is frequently ignored on these occasions. The Kanaka jams the hook in where the neck meets the shell. There is a brief

fight and then another week's supply of meat is being towed helpless ashore. With fair luck during the salwal an island can stock its larder for several months ahead, with the additional advantage the livestock doesn't have to be fed or watched and they always know they will find it just where they left it.

Such an island can relax and be happy for the next year, while another island a hundred miles or even fifty miles away, may find itself (so the breaks run) entirely neglected by turtles during the salwal and even the nesting season, though the following year conditions might be reversed. The unfortunate island may face semi-starvation. It might be noted in this regard that the shell of the green-back turtle is not the tortoise-shell of commerce. This comes from another species known as the hawksbill whose flesh is not only disagreeable in flavor but is also highly poisonous. Native villages have been known to have been half depopulated because, due to the failure of the green-back salwal and nesting turtle seasons, the Kanakas, tired of the eternal diet of coconut, taro and fish, have taken a chance on eating a hawksbill or two with disastrous results. This reptile's poison seems to have the effect of killing off the older and sick people and the very young babies, who are nursing, and whose mothers have eaten hawksbill and apparently suffered no ill effects.

Because this giant reptile, like its almost as large, extremely vicious and not so edible cousin the loggerhead, is seldom seen along northern coasts, it is often assumed that it is quite rare. This is not the case. The green-back has a world range but is confined mainly to tropic or semi-tropic waters. With other species, and where man has not been wantonly destructive, it literally breeds by the thousands in such spots at the Great Barrier Reef islands; the Torres Strait islands; the West Indies; the Seychelle Islands; Ascension Island; on many beaches in the Caribbean and off the countless islands of the South Seas. On some of the lonelier beaches and during the nesting period hundreds of females at a time can be seen scooping out hollows with their flippers, depositing eggs with almost machine-gun rapidity, and then carefully flipping the sand back again to cover the clutch. They leave anywhere from fifty to a hundred eggs in a clutch and may leave other clutches later.

The eggs are about the size and shape of a ping-pong ball and have tough, leathery shells. They taste a bit fishy and oily for a white man but the natives consider them quite a delicacy when they can get them. I say "when" because from the start it is a race between the natives, the gulls and the island crabs and hogs, if any, to see who can locate a clutch first and get into it, unless of course the natives have watched the female finish her laying first before tipping her over. About the only reason the green-back survives at all is its sheer fecundity. It spreads so many eggs around, two or three are bound to get away, and of these at least one escapes the sharks and reaches full growth.

IN MANY places where turtle is practically a drug on the market, its food value is secondary to its value as a sporting proposition. It is harpooned from a canoe or a small boat (by moonlight for more excitement) and it is hardly necessary to add that it takes a very good harpooner indeed to hit the exact soft spot where the head joins the shell, especially when your quarry is streaking away. Native experts can even hit it when it's under water and still diving. The harpoon mostly used is a pronged affair attached to a fifteen foot handle. The harpoon itself is detachable and is made fast to a line. The native stands in the boat's bow which is pulled around as silently as possible until the turtle is spotted. The slightest undue noise and the turtle is off, so you try and ease up on it, or more often over it as they frequently just browse along a few feet below the surface. The harpooner gets poised as he comes near, steadies his long harpoon handle, and then suddenly lets go often going over with the harpoon to give it greater driving force. Then, the quarry secured, he will clamber back on board with the handle while the line attached to the embedded harpoon goes whizzing out.

From then on you have dynamite on your hands as a full grown green-back tows at the rate of several knots and does some very fancy twisting and diving and coming up and diving again.

If you run into choppy water you might get swamped, for it's possible your quarry can get the line under the boat and upset you by a double back. There is scarcely such a thing as tiring him out as you would a fish. So long as he can use his powerful flippers he keeps going, and could probably go on all day. Fortunately he doesn't dive very deep, and he doesn't break water and try to shake you off or break the line. But every once in a while he will sort of stop to pause, to think the thing over as it were, and then you take in line until he starts going again.

You just keep on taking in line during the quiet seconds until you have him finally almost under the boat. Then someone goes overside and passes a line around his flippers and apart from some vain wallowing, he gives up. As he's always too heavy to lift into a small boat the only thing you can do is tow him to some place where you get a chance to strand him and turn him over. No turtle ever seems to get killed by a mere harpoon, even when the head is almost completely severed. In fact, even when the head is completely severed the essential organs go on functioning for a considerable time. Which brings me back again to their astonishing tenacity on life.

The worst feature of turtle hunting, as one writer aptly puts it, is the butchering. Aside from turning any weak stomach, it is apt to give you a very queer feeling for other reasons. First, you cut off the head and carefully dispose of it, for a reason I will explain later. Then you face the major operation of cutting the breast shell away, and after you have it off all in one piece you are then confronted with a gory mass of meat and entrails.

And a very queer feeling comes over you because everything is still working. The thing is dead by all you've ever learned in physiology. But it isn't. The heart beat is still powerful and if there's any food inside, the intestine still seems to be working on it. There is a general belief that a shark's heart, cut out, will beat to sunrise but this is only partly true. A shark's heart will pulse for a while, not necessarily to sunrise, and then will twitch for a while longer. But there is no mistake about a turtle's heart. You can put it on a shelf and watch it beat all day, and there are oldtimers who claim it is good for three days, but I never stayed around that long to find out.

It is a messy job getting the entrails separated from the meat, but once that's accomplished you have some delectable eating, and also a hell of a lot of meat as the edible part runs to about a quarter of the turtle's over-all weight and curiously enough seems to remain fresh longer, even in the tropics, than any ordinary meat. The shell is no use, unless you want to pack around a pretty cumbersome souvenir, though I've heard of a hermit living on a Barrier Reef Island who has built his house and store shed entirely of giant carapaces which certainly should make it a curious sight. For myself I have often thought they would make elegant ash-trays for some friends of mine who don't seem able to hit even a good-sized bucket with a cigar stub.

I have one last authentic incident to record about the turtle's hold on life. Coming up from Ascension to London one trip, with the usual load of turtle on board, the skipper decided to butcher one he'd been taking home for himself as a special treat for certain very distinguished passengers who were on board. The head chef supervised the killing, which naturally began with severing the head; managed the cutting up, cleaning and cooking all right, though it was his first experience with turtle of that size. Then, wishing to keep the huge empty carapace as a personal souvenir, he had it hung up near the foot of the foremast to dry. The head, which he had not first disposed of, was still attached, hanging by a mere shred of flesh.

Coming along the deck soon after, a young ordinary seaman stopped out of natural curiosity to inspect the great shell and eventually put up his hand to examine the head. The disembodied jaws opened and snapped shut. The boy lost two fingers, cut off almost as cleanly as if by an ax.

By STEVE FRAZEE

GHOST-MINE

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER

By STEVE FRAZEE

GHOST-MINE GOLD

A FOOL'S quest for fool's gold—that's what every oldtimer in Sylvanite calls it when RIGDON SADAR turns up in town, during the Boom Days celebration, to search for a fortune in gold ore which his grandfather was suspected of stealing forty-five years before. But young Sadar believes the gold is still there somewhere—27 sacks of it—in the abandoned tunnels of Sylvan Mountain. And before he starts his own mining venture with a friend, JOE TANNER, he is determined to prove old SAM RIGDON'S innocence. But Tanner has set a deadline of one week for Sadar to find the gold!

In Sylvanite, Sadar meets old man ROUVIERE, millionaire boss of the town, his daughter, JACKIE, and his manager, "BIFF" REEVES. He makes friends with DEEDEE DUCRAY, an old miner from whom he hopes to learn something that will help him locate the gold ore—and talks with JACK RALSTON, who owns the Hibernian mine, next to the Vivandiere, where the gold disappeared. Ducray takes Sadar to dinner at the Fire Horse Club, where he introduces him to several of the "boys," including SIM TARWATER who once worked at the Vivandiere. Later, Jackie Rouviere comes in with Reeves, who starts an argument with Sadar. In the ensuing fight, Sadar knocks out Reeves. Jackie takes Reeves home. After their departure, BEN LIGGETT, who runs the Fire Horse Club, warns Sadar he'd be smart to leave town—and Sim Tarwater, once a friend of Sadar's grandfather, repeats Ben's warning. On the way back to his hotel, Sadar pauses underneath a street light. Something clangs against the metal post and falls to the ground nearby. Sadar picks up the missile which so nearly struck him. It is an arrow, the shaft of aluminum, the steel head ridged and tapered to a deadly point . . .

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after the vanished gold, plays along and accepts. His next stop is the *Sylvanite Times* where he unearths the files on the old robbery at Rouviere's Vivandiere Mine, then owned by MARCUS BESSE. The precious gold-bearing calaverite had been closely guarded until the night it was to be taken from the mine, when it disappeared into thin air. Sam Rigdon, as mine superintendent, and Sim Tarwater, on guard duty, were under suspicion. And though Besse never accused them of more than "negligence," the rumors had persisted through the years.

When Rouviere learns that Reeves has hired Sadar, he tells him frankly that he suspects his manager of having something on his mind other than business affairs—and genially fires Sadar on the spot. But he insists on paying him two weeks' salary.

Early the next morning, Sadar starts up the mountain. He finds an opening into the abandoned Vivandiere and cautiously enters the sagging portal, past rotting timbers and rocks precariously balanced. Something starts a slide behind him. Sadar is trapped; the water in the old tunnel, its outlet closed off by the slide, begins to rise . . .

PART III

IF Rigdon Sadar had inherited anything from his grandfather besides a huge frame and a resemblance that Sam Rigdon's old friends had recognized instantly, it was a tendency toward coolheadedness under pressure.

He sat on the slope of muck just inside the portal of a tunnel he didn't even know the name of and watched cigarette smoke drift along the granite roof to freedom above the streaks of sunshine. He scowled at the broken piece of lagging beside him and tried to think calmly.

Maybe those rocks had slid by themselves. Their hold on the hill had been slight.

He wondered who the other fool was who had recently preceded him into the tunnel. That idiot had been luckier: he had got out again.

Water began to suck near his feet. That's what he had been waiting for, a sound that meant water had begun to melt away the fine material clogging passage through the rocks. If he didn't trample about on the muck pile, tamping fines into crevices with his big feet, the water would give him no trouble. But sitting still wouldn't gain him his freedom, wouldn't remove that jam of rocks, even though trying to move them might bring down a roller he couldn't get his legs away from. Someone outside could unblock the entrance without much work or danger.

Very good, Sadar, all you have to do is wait for someone to come by—next month or next year. He felt the rotten lagging that had fallen on him. It wasn't far to the bridle path above . . .

The hours went slowly, while he beat down a growing urge to get up and start tearing at the barrier with his hands. In a short time he'd have to, he saw.

Then he heard voices outside. He shouted. The words were sounds that ran hollowly in the bore, rolled around him and died quickly. There was silence outside, then rock clattered and the light was shut off completely.

"What are you *doing* down there?" a woman's voice asked.

"I was born here!" he yelled.

"Oh!" He heard laughter, heard talking he couldn't understand. Then the voice came once more. "In that case, you won't mind it down there a little longer. Stay back!"

He kicked gray fragments of smoldering wood into the water. The action gave him satisfaction, because twice he had put the fire out entirely by misjudging the amount of water to drip on the wood for maximum smoke. He waited in knee-deep icy water. Rocks bounced down the slope, splashed more water on him. The ends of boards showed through a growing opening; his rescuers laughed and joked, occasionally shouting down to inquire if he was still there.

Jackie Rouviere smiled at him as he scrambled up the slope and clawed his way free of the rocks. He blinked at her and felt foolish. Chubby Myra, the beard-yanking conspirator, was standing with a board in her hands. Two horses on the dump pricked their ears toward him.

"Thanks," he said.

Jackie brushed her hands together and frowned. "It's going to cost you more than that for giving me abandoned-mine hands. What on earth were you doing down there?"

"I got to chasing a rabbit so fast I couldn't stop."

Myra giggled, the vibration running to all parts of her body. "Jackie saw

your smoke. I would have ridden right on past, little knowing that we had a man trapped and at our mercy."

"I have an investigative mind," Jackie said. "Did you catch the rabbit?"

"It got away." Sadar glanced at the uphill slope. Lying where the rocks had started sliding was a dead aspen, recently torn from the ground. Mold still clung to the root stubs. "I guess you used my tree after all," Sadar said.

Jackie shook her head, watching him closely. "We didn't even see it until after we tore a couple of boards off that old shack."

The aspen hadn't been there before he went into the hole; the girls hadn't used it, according to Jackie. But someone had—to start the slide.

He heard the sound of a horse on the bridle path. Jackie shouted. "Biff! Up here!" She explained to Sadar: "Biff rode out ahead of us to look at a lodge site on top of the hill. We got tired of waiting where he was supposed to meet us at Number Zero Viv."

Sadar glanced at the aspen again, and saw that Jackie Rouviere followed his look quickly.

He had to allow that Reeves rode well as he watched the red-bearded man work his horse up the steep pitch below the dump. Reeves was wearing faded dungarees, short boots with logger heels and a plaid shirt. Every hair on his head seemed to be in place and his beard was shining. He dismounted on the dump, his reddish-brown eyes taking in the scene alertly. "This looks like quite a party. I'll bet there hasn't been so many people on the old Commander dump since 1910."

He knows the names of things well enough, Sadar thought. Reeves' face told him at a glance that Rouviere had made no secret about Sadar's being fired. His face changed perceptibly as Jackie began to tell what had happened. When the girl had finished the explanation, Reeves glanced casually at Sadar as if he no longer mattered, as if he had been weighed and found light. The strong dislike Sadar had read in the other's eyes, even when Reeves was trying to be pleasant with his underhanded proposal, was back in force now.

He figures I don't know what the hell I'm doing, Sadar thought. He's right, what's more. From now on I'm right back on that well-known list of his. He wondered again if Reeves knew anything about the calaverite, or whether he had been edging toward an unholy alliance to find out what Sadar knew.

"Did you *build* that lodge while you were up the mountain, Biff?" Myra asked.

Reeves jerked himself away from some obviously unpleasant considerations. His smile came smoothly. "I'm sorry I held you up. I cruised a little timber while I was up there and sort of forgot how late it was getting. That site I picked has everything!" He buried himself in a description of several natural advantages overlooked by the world for years.

Sadar wondered how the mountain had got along all this time without Reeves.

Jackie glanced at the sun. "After all, I'm supposed to meet Dad for dinner. We'd better get to getting." She looked at Sadar. "Need a horse to ride down, or are you unshaken by your harrowing ordeal of ninety-nine hours in an old mine with neither food nor companionship?"

Sadar grinned. "I'm going on up toward Deedee's mine."

Reeves shook his head. "They're not there now. They were when I rode up, but they were gone when I came back."

It struck Sadar that either Ben or Deedee could have shoved the rocks down into the Commander portal. He studied Reeves carefully, wondering if Reeves had mentioned their absence from the mine with the calculated idea of planting guilt on them.

Reeves looked back coldly, his expression plainly saying, "You're no good to me, Sadar."

"If you *have* to go calling on people, you can always slip around the mountain and see that little man Tarwater," Myra said. "Jackie tells me you think she ought to give Biff-Biff back to him," she added irrelevantly.

"I may go see him, at that," Sadar said lightly.

"Don't stay after dark." Jackie swung to her horse. "The lion, you know," She glanced carelessly at the aspen pole, then rode off the dump.

CHAPTER X

WAITING GAME

SADAR listened to the thump of hooves as the party rode away. He took off his shoes, wrung out his socks and laid them to dry for a while in the sun. As he sat there it came to him that he'd been downright lucky to get out of the hole without a broken leg. For the first time since being released he had full opportunity to give way to the expansive feeling that comes over every man walking into fresh air and sunshine after a shift underground.

He glanced over his shoulder at the aspen lying above the portal. This was the second time someone had tried to slow him down, and though the attempt had not been as dangerous as the arrow from the dark, perhaps it had been the best opportunity available to the person who was after him. He could have got out of the tunnel by himself, at some risk of a broken leg, to be sure. Whoever shoved the rock down must have known that. Perhaps the incident had been more of a warning rather than a deliberate attempt to kill him. That would indicate the rocks had been started by someone other than the person who had tried to whisk the broadhead through his belly, unless the whole thing had been a spur-of-the-moment deal.

At any rate, it was the result of his own foolishness and someone's grasping of a handy opportunity.

He wondered about the tracks. The person who had made them—why had he gone down to investigate in a dangerous place? He put on his shoes and walked over to look at Reeves' tracks. The heel-marks were deep and clean-cut.

Above the portal there were no marks similar to the ones Reeves had made. The rock-pusher hadn't even got off the mat of humus and undergrowth in order to reach out with the pole and get the rocks to moving. He examined the aspen. In several places the root stubs showed dents from having been jammed hard against stone. He prowled around in the trees and found the place where the pole had been torn from the soil.

You're a great detective, Sadar told himself. After something happens you can find evidence that it happened—and that's all.

He went back over his two days in Sylvanite, trying to evaluate what he'd accomplished. Arriving without any sort of plan, because he'd lacked information from the very start, he'd worked so far on a hit-and-miss basis, trying to cover every angle that came up. He'd made only one stride: convinced himself that someone else had an idea where the calaverite was, such a good idea that Sadar's very presence was a threat.

Many of the puzzling things he'd encountered—the endless, uncertain poker game at the Fire Horse; Reeves' crookedness and his quick change of attitude toward Sadar; Sim Tarwater's personal history—all might have some sort of bearing on the highgrade. The attempt to kill him with the arrow certainly must, and several other incidents; but if he tried to clear them all up individually, he'd be getting nowhere. Eventually the pattern might take shape, but in the meantime his seven days would be gone. Even if he concentrated on finding the person who had tried to kill him and did find that person, the individual wouldn't automatically tell everything about the calaverite.

He was going to have to follow one straight line, one thing at a time. So far

This was the second time, thought Sadar, that someone had tried to slow him down.

the most promising lead he had was Sim Tarwater.

Sadar went as fast as he could climb toward Tarwater's cabin.

The little man was not there. The conies came out of their retreat and barked at him, then retired in haste. Chipmunks ran along the walls and chittered at him as he stood with the door open and looked inside. Less than half of the cabin was given to living quarters; the rest held a woodworking shop, including a lathe powered by a gasoline motor. Sitting in a cleared space was a completed porch seat made of aspen and cedar, the red and white of the latter wood shining so brightly Sadar knew that it must have been covered with clear varnish only a short time before.

All windows were covered with a lattice of light wooden bars.

That Sim encouraged no overnight visitors was evident from the fact that there was only one single bed in the room.

He shut the door, looking curiously at the outside bar from which a piece of clothesline rope led through a hole in the planking. In Sim's case the old gag about the latchstring was reversed. Sadar stooped to peer into the square opening through the logs near the free end of the bar. The small passage was blocked midway by a swinging door, a neat barrier that swung outward only, he discovered when he poked at it with his fingers.

The pickup truck in the shed had two flat tires. They had been that way so long that the ground under them was damp. He wandered over to the ford that crossed Tumbling River. Tire marks of recent origin showed in the grassy bank on the near side. Apparently there was a road of some sorts from the cabin to the yellow slash that marked the highway cut on the mountain a mile beyond.

He sat down on the chopping block and waited. After an hour he had made friends with two chipmunks, one of which was the fat job that had run up Tarwater's back. He waited some more.

Light was going from the grassy meadows up the creek; the silvertips were turning blue; trout were beginning to feed on insects along the shallow edges of the beaver ponds when he decided to wait no longer. He admitted to himself freely that he didn't care to walk back down the trail in the dark. He wondered if Sim had spotted him from the edge of the trees and was waiting until he left. Tarwater would know there was only one reason for his being here—and Tarwater didn't want to discuss that reason.

In the light of what Ben had told him of Sim's experience after the robbery, Sadar could respect Tarwater's desire not to be reminded of the old days. But Sim's life was behind him; Sadar's was ahead, and he didn't want it to be forever troubled by old ghosts, false though they were. Freedom from the past was something Sim had tried to attain by running away from people. The haunted uneasiness of his eyes was proof that the effort hadn't been successful.

Tarwater would understand, Sadar felt sure. But first he had to be cornered.

He waited until dusk, then started down the backtrail. At the edge of the timber he looked back, hoping to see Tarwater appear. The cabin looked gloomy, and the trees seemed to have moved in closer toward it.

HE ATE dinner at the Big Stope, surprised to find the food not nearly as bad as he had expected. He was not surprised to find he owed two and a half dollars for a small steak. If Reeves was free-handed in spending Rouviere's money, he was also careful about gathering in more of it to spend. Well, what with tourist season in full bloom and Boom Days in the offing . . .

He stopped at the desk in the lobby to chat with Al Harris, reading from the clerk's expression that Al would welcome a chance to talk about Sadar's mission. Terry and Gary temporarily gave up their slugging of each other to listen to Sadar and watch him with great interest. He felt they were scanning his pockets for evidence of bulges that would betray success.

"Anybody still living around here who worked at the Vivandiere when the vug was tapped?" Sadar asked. "Besides Sim Tarwater, I mean."

Al shook his head. "Not a soul that I know of. There's a few oldtimers who claim to know all about it, now that so

much time has passed, but when you pin 'em down you find they never really worked at the Viv at all—on any levels."

"*You've* stirred around a little after that calaverite?"

Al grinned. "When I was a kid I put in my shift schambling around old diggings looking for it."

"I looked this morning!" Terry or Gary said. "I went in a lot of places!"

Sadar looked at the bellhops. "Including the Commander?"

The bellhops stared at each other.

"Where the blacksmith's shop was leaning way over to one side toward the ditch?" Sadar prompted.

"Yeah!" the boys said together. "I wouldn't crawl down in that old place!" one of them added.

That's fine, Sadar thought. I stuck my neck out to follow a curious kid's tracks. He gave both bellhops warning about going into old diggings, advice that he knew wouldn't be heeded. Toward the end he felt his lecture going a little limp. By their expressions Terry and Gary considered it a waste of time from the start.

Sadar turned back to Al. "How about Ducray and Ben Liggett? Where'd they work?"

"My old man tells me Deedee was at the Digman mine most of his career. Liggett was a railroad engineer, I think."

"I see." Sadar watched the bellhops snapping each other's lone suspender. "Was Rouviere around this morning?"

"He was riding on the mountain. He does almost every day, generally in the morning."

One of the bellhops nudged Sadar. "Carry me by the seat of my pants—like you did him," nodding toward his twin.

Sadar grinned at Al. He took both boys by the slack of their pants and carried them across the lobby to the mine car. He dumped them inside. They were delighted and immediately tried to tip the car over. "I'll beat you to the loot yet!" one of them cried as Sadar started out the door.

He stopped to hold the door for Mrs. Mahogany on her way inside. She beamed her thanks, looked at Terry and Gary struggling in the car and set herself for a conversation.

"Such delightfully vital boys!" she cried. "They remind me—"

Sadar bowed. "Thank you, madam!" he said, as if taking all earthly credit for Terry and Gary. He left her slightly uncollected and went out.

The Fire Horse Club was locked and dark. In the gloom of night the building lost its inhabited identity and seemed to revert gladly to the air of decay that characterized all the other structures near it, as if it had struggled too long to remain aloof from comrades falling in ruin.

He heard snores at Deedee's shack even before he opened the wire gate. The sounds were fearful when he stood by an open window at the side of the house. Just listening made Sadar yawn. He was more tired from the tension of sitting in the Commander tunnel most of the day than he would have been from strenuous exertion.

He closed the gate gently behind him.

Old Charlie was not on his throne of broken springs. The seat was occupied by a moon-faced fat lad who was trying to read a comic book in the poor light from the bulbs above the pumps. He explained that Charley didn't work except when he damned pleased and this evening was not one of the times Charley pleased.

Sadar stopped in the Windlass Bucket for one drink, seeing no one he cared to know at the moment. He had a thin malted milk in the drugstore, watched a group of youngsters enjoying free reading at the magazine rack and tried to appear interested when the druggist got rather bitter about the horrible things the East was doing to the West.

In front of the hotel Sadar watched for a few minutes swarms of insects that got too gay with the searing tongues of the carbide lamps, departed this world with a *sput!* and went into flat spins toward the walk.

Terry and Gary were slumped in the shapes of bent automobile cranks on a leather-covered sofa, storing up energy for their next enterprise. Al had taken off his hardboiled hat and was rubbing gently at the red band the webbing had left on his forehead. In a chair near one of the granite columns, a position that commanded all inlets and bayous of the lobby, Mrs. Mahogany was waiting to make a conversational power dive in

someone's direction. She shifted a little and gave the impression of warming up her motor when she saw Sadar.

He got his key quickly and went upstairs.

He was restless in his room, feeling tension over a day that had yielded nothing. A while before at Deedee's shack he'd felt tired enough to fall asleep on the ground, and now he was wide awake.

Shoes and jacket off, he lay down on the bed, trying to make scattered facts and impressions fit into some kind of a complete unit. They wouldn't jell.

He wished that he had asked Rouviere to see the maps of the Viviandiere levels, so that he could have a clear idea of what the working near the vug had looked like forty-five years before. That would help some, but more important were the workings of the Hibernian. Fat chance indeed would there be to see the level maps of the Hibernian. Fat chance . . . Water dripping down the shaft outside his window sent cool air into the room. He imagined he could hear the comfortable rumble of Tumbling River gnawing at rock in its canyon passage. There sure were a lot of holes on Sylvan Mountain . . . and Dill could swim with salmon . . .

He woke at two o'clock, blinked savagely at the light, took off his clothes and staggered headlong into bed. In the instant before he fell asleep, as clear as a white cloud in bright sunshine, he saw the green iron Mike before the drugstore. Standing beside it and smiling at him was the grandmother he had never known.

CHAPTER XI

INDIAN IN THE BIG STOPE

THE sun had not yet touched the forest floor next morning when he approached Sim Tarwater's cabin, watching carefully for the lion as he walked. Rising smoke told him that he had Sim trapped for the moment, at least. Now, if he could hold him long enough to keep him from taking a sudden sidewise dart into the woods . . .

He was still fifteen feet from the door when Sim's shout came from the inside:

"Wait a minute!" Tarwater's tone carried a crack of urgency Sadar hadn't heard before.

"Go a ways toward the river!" Sim yelled.

Sadar obeyed, wondering if anyone ever had got close enough to Sim's cabin to knock before his presence was known to Tarwater. He saw Sim's thin face peer from the barely opened door. Then the planks swung wide and Tarwater began to speak in his normal, soothing voice.

A long brownish form flowed through the doorway. The lion saw Sadar instantly, started toward him slowly.

"Don't get excited," Sim said quietly. "He's just curious." He spoke to the lion without raising his voice and the big cat stopped. It scratched the ground in a humping stretch, then went around the corner of the cabin and disappeared in the forest. Sim waved Sadar inside.

"You don't keep that little playmate in here all night, do you?" Sadar asked.

Sim shook his head, his eyes darting over Sadar s face. "I can trust him just as far as his nature will let him be trusted. I make sure he's never in after dark." Sim waved Sadar toward a rawhide chair. "Had your breakfast?"

Sadar nodded.

"Want another cup of coffee?"

"No, thanks." Sadar remembered his determination not to pulnge headlong into topics that would disturb Tarwater. "You seem to get along pretty good with animals," he said.

Little Sim nodded. "You can tell what an animal will do. Take Chinook, the lion, for instance—he'd jump me in a second if he got too restless from being cooped up, or if I ever hurt myself and he got a strong whiff of fresh blood. But if those two things never happen, he'll stay with me until he's almost full grown. Then he'll walk into the woods some day and never come back, except maybe to prowl around the cabin sometimes at night, or follow way off to one side of me when I'm alone in the woods."

Sadar saw that much of the fever was gone from Tarwater's eyes. He decided to follow the animal tack for a while.

Sim's face relaxed, his eyes held Sadar's without darting and now and then he smiled as he talked about his pets. The bars on the windows, he explained, he

had put in place because the summer before he had had a pet deer that believed any light meant an exit. The curious latch arrangement was an outgrowth of a cub bear's habit of opening the door in the middle of the night, and neglecting to close it. The cub had learned to master several simple bar locks, but wound up completely baffled when Sim put the bar outside and left the latch inside. "He had that bar in his mind so strong he was lost when he couldn't see it, even when I tried to teach him how to pull the string from the inside."

The coppery little man confirmed Sadar's guess that the one-way swinging door in the chute near the bar was to allow egress for smaller pets and prevent their coming in to do mischief in the cabin while Sim was absent.

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Sadar his equipment and explained that he spent a great deal of time making lawn and porch chairs for a market Deedee had developed.

Rustic chairs, the mine on Sylvan Mountain, vegetable gardens . . . Ducray had worked pretty hard to keep the oldtimers going.

Sadar said so.

Tarwater bobbed his head. "He never took a cent for anything. Deedee had a little money saved. When things went bad for some of us he helped out till he was busted. Him and Ben got that club down there so any oldtimer could have a place to go and stay. I've seen both Ben and Deedee go without clothes to help other people out. I've seen 'em go hungry and laugh about it, so's someone else could eat."

It occurred to Sadar that Ben and Deedee might have an income from some hidden source. Suppose they'd found the calaverite and were siphoning it off as legitimate ore taken from their mine on the mountain? The thought became strong. He'd check that mine just as soon as possible. In the meantime Tarwater was talking so naturally, he'd try to bring him around to the robbery gently. Maybe if he let Sim run on the little man might bring the subject up without direction. It was a lot to hope for, but he was encouraged by the steadiness of Sim's eyes.

HE LISTENED to Tarwater explain an oil treatment to prevent native cedar from drying out and cracking; the way to slant dowel holes for maximum strength when using aspen wood. Sadar nodded, his eyes straying to the long bow and red quiver laid on pegs on the cabin wall.

Sim stopped in the middle of a sentence.

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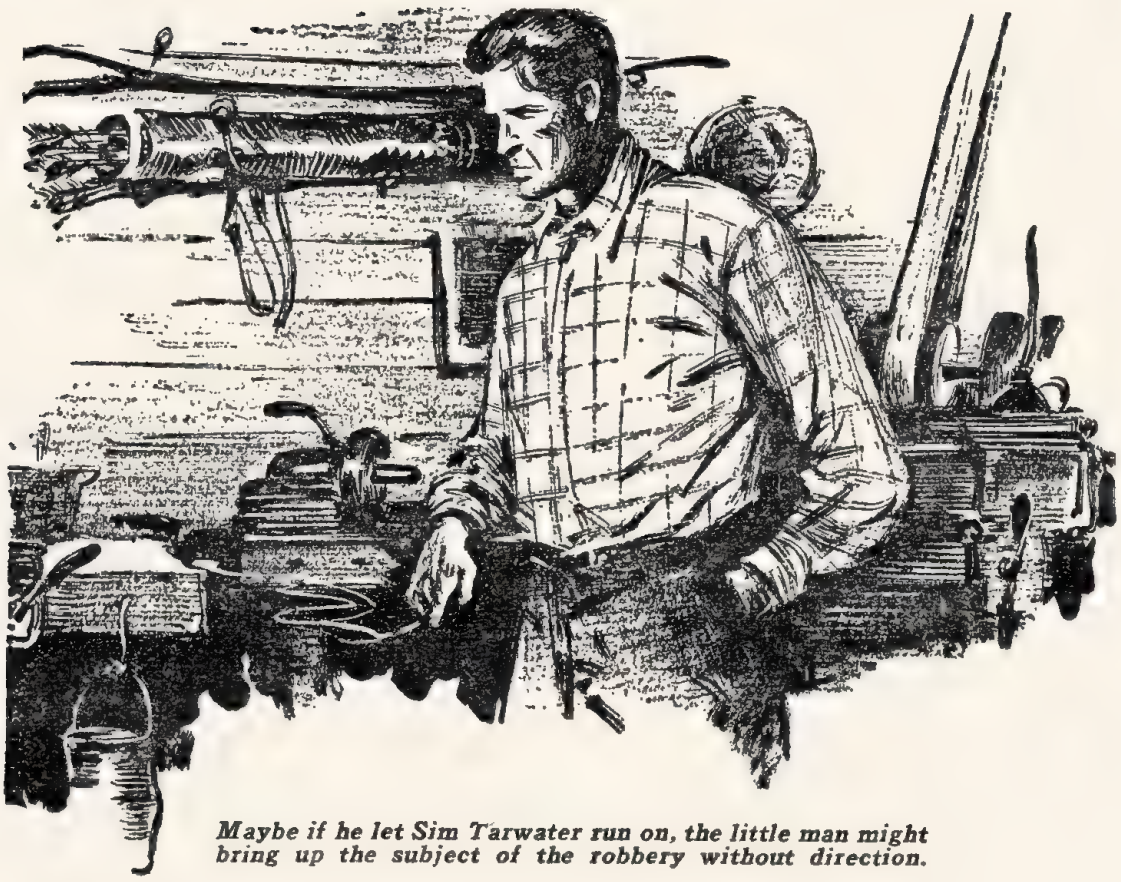

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the weapons. All the tension, all the restlessness was back on his face. He walked quickly across the room, shook the coffee pot on the stove and stood indecisively.

That fouled the deal for sure, Sadar thought. I wonder if Sim is the one who whipped that arrow at me?

Sadar stood by the lathe and started talking. He fumbled for words at the start, but after a while he found them coming easier. As he went on he realized that never before had he completely unburdened himself of many details concerned with the lie that had galled him all his life. He told about his mother, of his fights from boyhood because other youngsters said he was a thief. He told how in junior high school he had been elected treasurer of some petty organization and shortly afterward had heard one teacher remark to another, "Those kids that elected Sadar were good politicians but poor historians." Both teachers laughed. Sadar walked into the room and hit one in the stomach. He was expelled, made to apologize before the entire school in order to gain reinstatement. That he had made his apology with reservations outlined tersely and privately to the teacher he'd struck, Sadar did not feel necessary to tell Sim.

He explained simply and without bitterness how his whole life had been colored by a lie; that he wanted to end forever sniping embarrassment.

"I want to live ahead and meet things as they come, not trying to drag along the curse of something that happened before I was born."

Tarwater had been fumbling absently with the coffee pot when Sadar started. During the narration he had picked the utensil up and set it down aimlessly several times. But now he was quiet as he looked across the room at Sadar.

"You told me it was better to forget the whole thing," Sadar said. "But you see it can't be done. You should know."

"I do know." The deep grooves in Tarwater's cheeks looked like carving in dark cedar; his eyes were blank to the present, full of things in the far past. After a full two minutes of moody introspection, he said, "I know what you mean. Things came from that robbery that have sent me out walking in the snow in the middle of the night when I couldn't sleep for thinking. You think time kills things like that. It does in a way, but still there's other times when things come back so strong the back of your neck feels numb and you think your head will bust from thinking."

"Those things will never come again. They can't be helped now," Sadar said. "But I have a whole lifetime ahead of me that I can make better by finding the calaverite."

Tarwater stared at him. "It *would* be better for you and Sam if it was found, but God only knows where it is."

"Somebody thinks he does. Somebody tried to kill me since I came to Sylvanite." Sadar kept his eyes off the bow and quiver.

Nor did Sim glance toward them. "Kill you? God! I thought all the killing was in the past!" His face became strained; his eyes stared fearfully past Sadar as old memories burned and writhed.

"If you know anything—if you have a guess, help me out, Sim."

"Help you . . .?" Tarwater was a long time coming back to the present, another long time coming to a decision. When he started to speak he seemed to be talking to someone in years gone by. "I said, 'Sam, those shots got me worried.' Mark Besse talked us both out of it. They wasn't right, neither, but then it was too late and when I seen Mell's timber station, I was headed to tell Sam. He was fired before I seen him, and I was too, only I didn't know it . . . That wasn't right at all . . ." Wonder at an injustice the years hadn't helped him understand twined in Sim's soft voice and he stared at Sadar without seeing him.

Tarwater's words bore out what Deedee had told Sadar about Sim's being difficult to understand at times; but he decided to let Sim go ahead and lead him back to confused spots later.

"I'm only guessing now, and even if I'm right you'd have maybe ninety days of dead work to find out, even if the timber's still holding. If it's gone . . ." Sim considered for several moments. "I'll tell you what I guessed."

Unconsciously Sadar stepped closer to hear that soft voice.

"Long before the vug was robbed an Injun went into the Big Stope. The

damndest geezer you ever seen, that was. Everybody figured—"

SOMEONE shouted from outside. Little Sim jerked nervously, his eyes going toward the bow and arrow on the wall and then toward the windows that faced the trail outside.

Sadar cursed, then quickly got control of himself.

"What about the Indian? I don't understand."

Another shout came. Sadar recognized Jackie's voice. Through a barred window he saw her and her father on horses. "Let 'em yell a while," he said, but Sim was already at the door opening it.

"We're just riding by," Jackie called. "Dad's going up to look around the ranch. We thought we'd say hello."

She declined Tarwater's invitation to come inside.

Sadar stepped over to the lathe. He told himself he wasn't exactly hiding; yet he had no desire to inject his presence into a conversation that might delay the riders from going on about their business and leaving him alone to hear Sim complete his statements. *Indian in the Big Stope . . . Mell's Timber Station . . .* The Indian business didn't make sense and Mell's station would have to be explained a great deal more.

He watched morning sunlight on Jackie's hair as she moved her head. Rouviere sat his horse solidly, his blunt face unmoving as he watched the cabin. Something about Rouviere gave the man an air of ruthless vigilance wherever one encountered him.

He heard Jackie laugh and warn Tarwater about letting Chinook inside the cabin. Rouviere inquired about stray cattle from his ranch up the river. Tarwater hadn't seen any lately, he said. "Some catch 'em, some don't," he told Rouviere in reply to a question about the fishing.

Presently the riders went on. Sim shut the door quietly.

All the fever was back in Tarwater's eyes. He moved restlessly as if memories were thrusting knives in him again. "She worries about me and Chinook," he muttered. He looked out the windows, glanced around the room nervously. "I've got to do something," he said.

"What you told me isn't clear," Sadar said.

"Not clear," Sim repeated. "Well, it was just a guess, Young Sam; just a bad guess, maybe."

He went across the room and got his bow and quiver. He started for the door.

For an instant Sadar considered stopping him by force, but saner thinking brushed the thought away instantly.

"I'll go with you," Sadar said.

"No!"

Tarwater paused at the door. "I may be gone all day. Make yourself to home."

The door closed quietly and Sadar saw the little archer go past an end window above the stove.

He sat down in the rawhide chair, swearing to himself that he wouldn't leave the cabin until Sim had returned and made clear his cloudy statements. No use to curse the luk that had sent Rouviere and Jackie riding by at the wrong time. Luck? . . . They were on the mountain quite early. Whatever the reason, something in their presence had upset Tarwater tremendously.

He got up and began to walk around the room. Ninety days of dead work, Sim said, even if his guess was right. Ninety days of mucking, timbering, catching up ground that might be loose for hundreds of vertical feet, only to get to some place that had been searched forty-five years before, a place where Sim "guessed" the calaverite might be.

According to Ben, Sim hadn't set foot in a mine for almost half a century, yet he'd made an estimate of time necessary to clear a way. The way Sim's mind had been running toward the past the estimate might have been based on conditions forty-five years before. Then how had the thieves reached the place . . .?

Ninety days or ninety months, the job had to be done someway. The fluorspar deal was about a dead duck by now, anyway. As Sadar walked the floor he knew he was going to stay in Sylvanite and keep trying as long as there was a chance, or as long as he thought there was a chance to find twenty-seven ancient sacks of highgrade.

Another pact with himself made, he broke the one of a few moments earlier: that of staying until Sim came back. Tar-

water might be gone all day and half the night—all night, sleeping in a cave somewhere with his head pillowed on that damn mountain lion.

CHAPTER XII

CAVE-IN

THE live hole Sadar stopped at lay athwart the ski course on top of Sylvan Mountain. Rock ledges on both sides showed why Rouviere could not have moved the extension out of this saddle without great expense. The two old men had been mighty sharp in staking the fraction.

A tiny blacksmith's shop with a forge stack made of carbide cans sat in the edge of the trees. No one was around. If fresh muck on the dump and the location of the shaft hadn't already convinced him, Sadar would have known Deedee had a hand in the mine when he looked down at precisely framed cribbing. He stood with one hand resting on the windlass beam for a moment, then lowered himself into the manway and climbed down.

The shaft ended on a dry bottom. Using matches he explored a narrow drift approximately thirty feet long, ending against a freshly shot breast where a half inch streak of sylvanite wandered through the gangue. He lit several matches together and examined the pay streak. A half inch wasn't much, and sylvanite was notorious for pinching to nothing without warning, but still it was plenty while it lasted. A wise miner would stay with that streak even if it left the shaft, went over the dump and climbed a yellow pine tree. In singlejack mining the streak would pay its way.

He was halfway out of the shaft when a shadow fell across the collar.

He looked up to see Ben and Deedee framed against the sky.

Liggett's big voice boomed down at him. "Shall we drop rocks on him now, Deedee—or shoot him for a highgrader when he gets out?"

Sadar laughed. "Hold your fire, boys! I surrender."

"Let's make him work on the windlass all day," Deedee said.

Sadar climbed on out.

The two old men were in digging clothes and were carrying lunch buckets. There was no denying the competent hard-bodied look of Liggett, but still Sadar was disturbed by the impression that Ben was out of place in rough working garb. He attributed the feeling to the fact that the first time he'd seen Ben, the old man was standing behind a bar in a white shirt.

"You get around early," Deedee said. "I've been over to see Sim already."

Ben stared down the shaft. "What do you think of our hole?"

"You got a nice streak down there. I'd like to have twenty-seven sacks of that stuff."

Ducray laughed. "So would we." His live brown eyes drooped at the corners and twinkled at Sadar. "You weren't looking for calaverite, by any chance?"

"Your workings are too new. I got to prowl some of the old ones to do that."

"Better stay clear of the Hibernian," Deedee warned. "Ralston is touchy as hell about those holes, and Ralston—well, he can't help his temper some of the time. I haven't been in the Hibe for years, but I can pretty well tell you what you'll find in the Vivandiere. I went through all the open levels with Rouviere last year when he was sort of figuring on opening some of it up.'

"What will I find?"

"Cave-ins," Ben said gloomily.

Sadar considered. After all, in spite of his determination not to waste time looking at the same ground hundreds had searched in vain, he didn't have anything to do. He could look at the Vivandiere for a few hours, then go back and try to catch Sim at home. "How many holes can I get into?" he asked Ducray.

Deedee pushed out his lips and thought. "Zero's in from the surface; One was open last year for six, seven hundred feet of the main drift; on Two the whole country is down from the—"

"How about showing me around?" Sadar asked. Suddenly he remembered the two weeks' wages from Rouviere. He took the money out and explained its source, omitting Reeves' duplicity in the hiring, though he suspected Ben and Deedee guessed the truth about that. He held the money toward Ben. "I'm not

trying to buy anything with it. It's just that I feel the same way you fellows do about Reeves and his ideas. Take it and buy a bottle or two of whiskey for the back bar."

HE'D expected the most opposition from Deedee, but Ducray didn't seem to be thinking about the money. He had an absent-minded, wistful look on his face. Liggett's eyes were hard and expressionless.

"Damn it! It isn't charity!" Sadar said. "Are you going to take it or not?"

Liggett's brown face spread in a slow grin. "Sure, we'll take it. Thanks."

"He gets sore at himself just like Sam when he was trying to help someone out," Deedee said quietly.

"You knew my grandfather pretty well?"

"He was a shifter at the Digman long before he ever went to the Viv as superintendent," Deedee said. "Sam's the one who got me loose and carried me out of a bad stope the time I got this hip, when everyone else had run like hell." His eyes went vague and he stared at the town far below. "Many's the time I played poker with Sam Rigdon."

Ben, too, seemed saddened by thoughts of days that would not come again. He stared moodily at the blacksmith's shop.

Sadar was embarrassed. "Speaking of poker, what kind of millionaire's game is that bunch and Jammer playing at the Fire Horse?"

"Millionaire's game?" Deedee said blankly. He and Ben stared at each other.

"I tried to donate that dough I just gave Ben, and the Jammer offered me three white chips. Not a damned soul cracked a smile either!"

Ben leaned on the windlass upright and began to laugh like a foghorn gone wild. Ducray's shoulder's shook; he closed his eyes and showed his teeth and gasped with laughter until Sadar thought the old man would choke.

"He jobbed you!" Ben groaned. "There ain't a cent in that game!" He began to laugh again.

Deedee nodded, his face red from laughing. "He's hell for a joke. The Jammer's face has fooled older men than you. Of course, the crowd went along with him!"

Sadar grinned. "I wasn't sure, but I'll admit they made me turn tail like a pup that had wandered into a dog fight."

Five minutes later, carrying freshly filled lamps, Sadar followed Deedee along the top of the mountain.

"What makes Ralston so sure the calaverite is in the Hibernian?" Sadar asked.

"Well . . . There's no question but what the vug was robbed from the Hibe stope, and I guess it's as good a place as any to figure."

They walked on through the trees.

"Did you ever hear of an Indian in the Big Stope, a funny sort of geezer?" Sadar asked.

Deedee's brown eyes went wide. "A geezer of an Indian?" He thought a moment. "You mean the one in the lobby, the one that used to be by the cigar stand?"

"Wrong Indian."

Deedee glared at him in exasperation.

As Ducray had said, Zero Vivandiere at the very top of the hill, was down like a glory hole. Rotting ends of posts showed above cave workings.

"Closer to a quarry than a mine," Deedee commented.

They went down the mountain to Number One. Standing at the concreted portal, Ducray adjusted his lamp and lit it. "I guess you know everybody in the country has been through these holes at one time or another, looking for those sacks of highgrade."

Sadar nodded. "Let's go in."

Damp coolness in the old bore wrapped itself around them. The rectangle of light behind them grew smaller and smaller. Their feet sent thumping concussions deeper and deeper into the dark. Small sloughs from the solid bore had trapped small pools of water. They slopped through and went on. No raises, no crosscuts—nothing diverged from the transit-straight line of the tunnel. Hissing flames from the lamps made their shadows jerk unevenly on the cold walls. Deedee's voice rang hollowly when he stated what Sadar already had guessed.

"This was drove to get under the original discovery at Zero."

They came against a solid block of caved rocks. Deedee raised his lamp.

"This is the end. We're under Zero and the whole country is down from here to the surface."

They went toward sunlight, sloshing through icy pools.

Sadar counted three hundred steps from the portal of Two before they were blocked by an oozing muck pile. He lit a cigarette from his lamp. Deedee told him in horror that such a habit would rot his teeth in no time.

"Calcium is good for the teeth," Sadar grinned. He stepped forward and examined the choke of slime, thick pink mud, small rocks and broken timber. "We must be somewhere close to being dead under that place where the railroad goes across an old stope."

DEEDEE swung his lamp upward as if he could follow its light to the surface. "Almost dead under. Forty, fifty feet ahead of us is a stope that runs clear to the surface from this level and down to about fifty feet above the level below us."

"Then this drift doesn't go beyond the stope?" Sadar asked.

"Hell yes! It runs, or used to run, a mile or more farther into the hill."

"Must have been some timbering job to carry this track where it goes through the stope," Sadar said.

"I never did see it, but men that did told me this level was just a long, flat box, bulkheaded top and bottom. The stulls were Oregon fir, fifty feet long. Miners that worked in there told me when you run a string of cars fast along that bulkhead it sounded like being inside a bullhide drum surrounded with thunder."

Sadar's light glistened on water dripping from the roof. He looked closely at the oozing muck pile. Somewhere not too far beyond that plug of debris was a body of water reaching up toward the surface, lying black and cold far back in the long drift. He felt a sudden urge to leave the place fast, thinking of the dismal *ca-choom!* sound his rock had made when he tossed it into the depths from the old railroad grade.

"That's the place where I told you the engine dropped," Deedee said. "It tore hell out of the bulkhead and went clear to the bottom of the stope—and there she is today, if it ain't rusted to nothing."

The old man started easing backward. "I wouldn't want to be in front of that muck if it started slipping. Let's sort of get out of here."

Outside they shut water off in their lamps and let sunshine soak into their bodies. "Want to look at some more of them?" Deedee said.

Sadar scraped his mud-laden shoe against a rusty rail. "May as well." When they started down the hill he asked, "Ever hear of a man named Mell?"

Deedee gave him a quick glance. "Jason Mell, you mean? He was one of the Vivandiere men killed during the trouble after the vug was robbed. Where'd you ever hear of him?"

"Ran across his name in old files at the *Times,*" Sadar said. "Was he a Hibernian miner?"

"No, he worked at the Vivandiere. Timberman or trammer, I forget which." Deedee laughed. "I remember him best by the way he used to get drunk and tear hell out of some of the parlor houses."

So Mell had been killed after the robbery. *Mell's timber station . . .* Must have been in the Vivandiere, all right. Maybe Mell had been involved in the robbery along with Hibernian men. The sacks could have gone from that abandoned Hibernian stope by some little-used combination of workings back into the Vivandiere. Yes, maybe back into the Vivandiere—or into some other mine a quarter of a mile away. Just how far those sacks had gone after removal from the vug depended on how much time there had been on that night forty-five years ago.

For the first time Sadar fully appreciated how cold the trail was that he was trying to follow.

They turned on water and went into Number Three.

A thousand feet of tunnel and endless shallow pools trapped by small sloughs lay between them and the portal when they passed a sagging chute and the dark blot of a raise that held the first stick of timber they had encountered on this level. They went approximately two hundred feet farther and were stopped by a jam of oozy muck laced with a jackstraw tangle of soggy timbers.

Deedee swung his light across the face

of the cave-in. Water was working from the muck, which was curled in slow flow around the ends of timber that rested against a long piece of pole spiling which angled across the drift. Sadar tapped the spiling with the side of his fist. It was drum-tight at the lower end, and didn't look very securely held in the niche where pressure had forced its lower end.

He knew that time had robbed the timber of its strength, but he remembered the old miner's saw that no timber could hold ground: timber merely kept ground from getting started. Though there was little life in that piece of spiling it could very well be holding the entire jam.

"I wouldn't want the contract to clear this mess," Sadar said.

"It's that, sure enough. This comes from the old raise that led up to the bottom of the stope about fifty feet above us, up there where the locomotive is. If you thought there was a lot of water piled above us when we were up on the next level, think of the mess of it overhead now."

Sadar thought and he didn't like what his imagination pictured. Nor did he like the oozing muck pile and the haphazardly wedged piece of spiling that seemed to be holding everything back. He rubbed his foot in slime that was as slick as mossy rocks in the bottom of a stream, and held his lamp steady on the jam to kill the impression that the whole block was moving.

"Let's get from here," Deedee said.

"Suits me."

Deedee slipped as he turned. With his free hand Sadar grabbed the old man's arm. Deedee's right arm went back to catch something. His lamp clumped soggily into the piece of angled spiling and then his shoulder struck against the upper end of the timber. He stumbled for balance, gained it and cursed. "No wonder I'm always hurting my hip!"

SADAR looked at the piece of spiling. Deedee's shoulder had knocked it loose at the upper end and now the pole lay across the muck pile. Sadar steadied his light, cursing shadows that gave the jam a moving appearance. The hackles on his spine rose and his back tingled.

The muck pile *was* moving. It was coming slowly toward them, the ends of broken timber twisting a little.

Deedee saw it too. "Hellfire and little fishes!" he cried hoarsely. "Let's go!"

They stumbled and slipped on slimy ties and rails, throwing their hands against the sides of the bore to keep from falling. Deedee jammed his burner into the wall and the lamp went dead. He dropped it with a hoarse oath.

"Get ahead, so I can see!" he yelled.

Sadar was already moving past him. As he ran he tried to think. They were a long distance in, but the muck might be slow in breaking loose, or might even choke up again. If it moved far enough to let the water behind it get started . . .

He thought of the raise they'd passed. They could take a chance on that; if there was a ladder left or enough sound timber to hold a man's weight. He started to shout his thought to Deedee as they neared the raise.

Then behind them sounded a thump that caused the light to flicker and whistle. They heard a sucking noise as if the mountain had drawn a deep breath through a lake of thick mud.

For an instant they heard nothing but the pounding of their own footsteps. They ran past the raise.

Deedee's hand slapped hard against Sadar's heel, almost tripping him. "My hip!" Ducray grunted.

He was flat on the tunnel floor when Sadar turned and came back.

"Get to hell out!" Deedee shouted. "Go on!"

Ground groaned and shifted. Timber broke with a strangely muffled crack and they heard another, louder, heavier thump.

Deedee rolled and sat up. "Get out!" he said.

Sadar thrust the light at the old man. He picked Ducray up and staggered deeper into the mountain, straight back toward the awesome rumbling sounds. The eight or nine steps he took to reach the raise seemed the longest distance he had ever walked.

He lifted Ducray as high as he could toward the manway. "Grab something."

Holding the lamp Ducray strained to reach overhead. Some of his weight went from Sadar. Damp wood broke with a

pulpy sound. All Ducray's weight came back on Sadar. Both men nearly fell. Sadar staggered and shifted his grip until he had Deedee midway between knee and thigh. He made another lift, slipping sidewise in the slime underfoot.

"For God's sake grab something!"

They heard the tunnel give out a long gushing sigh. The sounds of water thundered in the bore.

All Ducray's weight left Sadar. He looked up to see the old man scrambling toward a gap in the partition between chute and manway. The lamp was hanging on a ladder rung above the first one that had broken under Deedee's weight.

When he leaped to catch the rung Sadar knew it was too high. He fell back, expecting to feel the smash of mud and timber against his legs.

The tunnel was filled with the sullen bellow of oncoming mud and debris.

"Grab my hands!" Ducray was draped on his belly across the partition, reaching down with both muddy hands.

Sadar leaped again, grabbing with his left hand for the side of the ladder at the broken rung. His other hand went past Deedee's extended finger, but the old man's grip clamped on Sadar's wrist. They were both helpless for a moment, Ducray's face twisted, his teeth showing.

Something jarred hard against Sadar. One leg went numb.

Slowly, with one foot against the sloping wall, his left hand breaking fingernails on damp wood and Deedee pulling on his right wrist, Sadar drew himself up to the partition.

Something like a sob came from Dee-

The old man's grip clamped on Sadar's wrist —they were both helpless for a moment.

dee and he hung so limply for a moment that Sadar thought he was unconscious from pain and grabbed by the X of his overalls.

"I won't fall, Sam," Deedee muttered.

The tunnel began to roar as if a hundred midget racers were speeding down it. Air rising from the dark flood caused the lamp flame to gutter upward and whine shrilly. Above them long sheets of white mold hung from damp timber like trailing remnants of fouled sails in the tangled rigging of a sunken ship. Rising air didn't reach high in the dead pocket of the raise. It came high enough to make the lamp protest, to stir the ends of the ghostly drapes of mold. With it came the odors of rotting timber, foul mud, damp rock and the faint smell of powder gas that seems to cling forever to blasted rock underground.

Below them the chute gates, posts and bottom of the chute were carried away and smashed almost before going out of sight. Timber flung sidewise across the bore broke sullenly. Other timbers were borne against the side of the raise and shot upward as if trying to claw their way out of the rushing flood.

They went higher in the manway as the water rose and began to send slaps of mud upward. Spread like frogs to place their weight as close as possible to junction of the rungs with the two-by-fours that formed the sides of the ladder, they wiped the clinging sheets of mold from their faces by rubbing against their shoulders, and hung on, breathing dead air and praying that the rungs would hold.

The water was moving so fast now it appeared to be motionless, until it flared angrily against timbers that tried to lodge across the bore. At times the mountain groaned from the shift of terrible weight. At such times they felt faint vibrations in the solid rock.

Above them the shroud-like drapes hung motionless. Below them the water pounded until its loudness reduced itself in their ears to a humming constancy. They began to get headaches from the dead air. Sweat soaked their bodies, though their feet felt numbed from their wet shoes.

Deedee kept shifting gently on the ladder above Sadar in an effort to take weight from his game hip. He spoke only once after climbing higher in the raise.

"It twists my guts to even think of it," he said.

CHAPTER XIII

AFTER THE FLOOD

FOR three hours the flood roared past. Sometimes it slackened, then came back with a bellow when momentarily blocking debris broke loose with tremendous thumps.

Quiet fell so quickly their ears seemed plugged. The flood was there one moment. The next the tunnel was still, except for the dripping of water from the roof. Tommy-knockers rapped somewhere in the workings. Ground shifted and gave forth its unearthly groan.

They waited a half hour longer to be sure.

Sadar dropped from the manway to the tunnel floor and helped Deedee. Their light was almost dead. Both were limping when they set off down the bore toward sunlight. No rail, no tie, no scrap of timber or loose piece of rock as large as a man's hand remained in the tunnel. The flood had left only a thin film of pink mud.

"It's a good thing you fell," Sadar said. "We never would have made it out."

Deedee nodded. His face was gray where it wasn't muddy.

They reached the portal and squinted their eyes against the light. It seemed to Sadar that everybody in Sylvanite was on the dump, the half of the dump that was left. The rest was spread in a wide pink fan at the edge of town on the end of a channel cut to bedrock all the way down the mountain. Green fragments of mangled trees showed in the wash. The old caved stope near the base of the hill was a lake of bobbing cans and trash boxes. Two boys on a plank raft were exploring it.

The big mine building on the dump had been sliced away to the boiler foundation.

The crowd looked at the two muddy men as if they were ghosts. Then everyone began to shout at once, rushing toward Sadar and Deedee. Ducray sat

down. "This is worse than the flood," he said.

Quick-striding Rouviere and Ben Liggett were side by side. Behind them Sadar saw Reeves and Jackie, the red-bearded man shouldering people aside with insolent carelessness as he held the girl's arm and brought her through the crush. Standing above the portal like a lean, sneering wolf was Jack Ralston.

Ben's deep shout brought momentary quiet. He raised thick brown-mottled arms and rumbled, "Let 'em talk!"

"We walked inside, saw water pushing a cave-in toward us, went up a raise and let her run," Sadar said.

Liggett's slate eyes smiled briefly. Some of the crowd laughed and others howled for details. Rouviere's face showed that he was not even mildly amused.

"That's all there was to it," Deedee said. "There must have been some water in there someplace."

Somewhere in the crowd Sadar heard Myra giggle.

Rouviere's voice was crisp. "What were you doing in my property in the first place?"

"Looking for Easter eggs, P.T.F.!" a gangling youth in a T-shirt yelled.

The crowd laughed.

Rouviere didn't seem to hear. His eyes popped from Sadar to Deedee. The hammer-like flatness of his jaw and mouth barely moved when he said, "You caused a lot of damage."

"*We* caused it!" Sadar stared at the millionaire. "Do you think we cut loose a body of stale water like that deliberately?"

"You were in there when it happened!" Rouviere rapped.

"Sure they did it, P.T.F.!" the skinny youth yelled. "They left the bathtub running!"

This, the voice of the crowd said, was going to be a pretty good show.

Jackie pushed past Rouviere and Ben. "Instead of the public forum to settle guilt, suppose we get Deedee off the hill. He looks like he could stand a ride."

"These two men deliberately—" Rouviere said.

"Yes, Dad, yes! You can sue them later." She looked at Reeves. "How about bringing my horse over here, Biff?"

"Get the goil's charger, bum!" the skinny heckler shouted.

Jackie smothered a smile and looked at Sadar. "You certainly know how to draw a crowd."

"Looks like we got everybody out but Terry and Gary," Sadar said.

"Who," Jackie asked, pointing toward the pink lake below Number Six Vivandiere, "do you think is out on that raft down there?"

ROUVIERE was already riding down the mountain, sun glinting on his bald head, when Ben and Sadar helped Deedee on the horse. Myra, Jackie and Reeves left with Ben and Deedee. Above the concreted portal Ralston kept his position aloof from the crowd, watching like a malign figurehead.

People began to press hard around Sadar, asking questions. His bruised leg was beginning to hurt. He hobbled over toward the portal and sat down on the slope of the hill, still surrounded by a large part of the crowd, some arguing about the amount of water that had gushed from the tunnel, some declaring that there probably was twice that much left inside. A few curious onlookers ventured a short distance into the tunnel, led by the gangling heckler, who had collected a rather substantial following of teen-agers.

Suddenly the youth came charging from the bore, bellowing that he heard more water coming. Those at the portal scattered. A red-faced fat man wearing fishing boots was knocked down, scrambled to his feet and was knocked down again. The crowd rocked with laughter.

Old Charley thumped Sadar's shoulder and cackled. "You sure pried up hell that trip, Young Sam!"

Sadar began to take his lamp apart. "Those stopes must have been regular lakes with underground fish, Charley." He dumped expended carbide on the ground, almost on the feet of two girls wearing Western costumes. One of the girls sported a long streamer across her front. *Boom Days Queen,* it announced. She wrinkled her nose at the rank carbide odor and said, "Phew!"

"No likum smellum, Queenie?" T-Shirt asked.

"That's just one big stope in there—not two," Charley said.

"You ought to know, Charley!" T-Shirt jibed. "You thought the railroad ran through there once!"

When he could be heard Sadar asked Charley, "Did *you* drop that engine?"

"I'm the one!" Charley said proudly. "A light Six Hundred she was, right smack into that stope above Number Two one day when I was coming down from the Evening Star." He glared at Sadar. "Didn't you know that?"

"I didn't know you were the engineer."

"I mean I was!" Old Charley looked around at the crowd. "I'd helped Ben Liggett up the hill with a string of ore cars . . ." Charley had some difficulty recalling who Liggett's fireman was. He got into a sharp argument over the man's name with another oldtimer. He described the weather, cursed a track crew who didn't know how to clean crossing properly, and extolled the beauty of a waitress at the Evening Star boarding house. At last he got started down the hill, digressing to explain that the air brakes on Old 607 were not up to snuff, because shopmen always did more damage than good when they worked on a locomotive. If you really wanted things fixed right, you always had to stop on the road somewhere and do the job yourself.

Eventually Charley put 607 into the stope.

". . . The fireman had unloaded. I'd opened my water brake valve and rared back on the Johnson bar, but she was

"We caused it!" Sadar stared at the millionaire. "Do you think we cut loose a body of stale water like that deliberately?"

still rolling toward that sagged place in the rails. So I left her too. When the pony trucks hit that cracked place—how the hell we didn't fall in on the way up is beyond me—the ingine just tip-ended and went down like that!" He slid one hand down the back of the other. "The last I seen is the back of the tender; the next minute the mountain sounds like it's rolling its guts!"

"Anybody working down below?" Sadar asked.

"Nope!" Charley said. "That stope was cleaned out and bulkheaded off years before. My Six Hundred tore out a pile of bulkheads on Two level, but they started timbering her up before the steam cleared out—and believe me, that mine was full of steam!"

Charley went into a description of the locomotive as he'd seen it in the bottom of the stope, but Sadar wasn't listening. He was struggling to recapture a thought that had come to the front of his mind, then darted back, as a familiar name eludes one just when he thinks he has it.

"When *was* that?" Sadar asked.

"Oh, Eighteen — no, Nineteen — daggonned if I can say exact. It was before I was married, the first time." Charley tilted his head and thought. T-Shirt asked if it was the winter of '76, and Charley told him to go to hell. "It was about two years before the vug was robbed!" Charley finally announced.

Two years before the robbery . . . Sadar wondered how well that stope had been sealed off after the engine tore things up. Surely it must have been searched; but even if it hadn't, the problem of getting to it now would be enormous.

Terry and Gary were still on their raft, presumably experimenting to see how far it would tip without spilling them into the water, when Sadar set off by himself down the mountain. He hadn't gone far when Ralston overtook him. "Nice deal you pulled up there," Ralston said.

Sadar held his temper. "Yep! Every Wednesday Deedee and I try to drown ourselves some way."

"Very unfunny!"

"That depends on whether or not you got a mind like a stack of old battery plates eaten up with acid."

Sadar glanced at Ralston's hip pocket. The automatic was still there.

"It'll cost you more than a suit for damages if you monkey with the Hibernian," Ralston warned.

"Such as what?"

"Don't be starting any floods on my property. Just don't even fool around it!"

"Don't blow your top, Ralston, until you catch me moving a rock on one of your lousy dumps."

Ralston's look was bubbling with vicious anger. His face grew lumpy and dark. For a moment Sadar thought the man's evil temper would lead him to violence. But Ralston took it out in a venomous stare and walked on ahead. "Remember what I told you," he said.

SADAR limped on down the trail, telling himself that he had a lot of things to find out. He began to regret that he had angered Ralston. That bitter, narrow-shouldered man might have a good lead on the calaverite, after all. Sadar had one dangerous enemy already, assuming that Ralston was *not* the one who had loosed the arrow and pushed rocks in at the Commander portal.

He wondered again about the stope where Charley's Six Hundred had plunged. Surely every possible hiding place in adjacent mines and the Vivandiere itself had been scoured by men who knew the workings well. Maybe the ore had been distributed behind side lagging; maybe the sacks, ore and all, had been dropped into some abandoned winze full of water. He didn't like the last theory. There had been twenty-seven sacks of highgrade and limited time to carry them to concealment. He had to believe time had been short, or else accept the certainty that the ore had been taken completely out of the mountain. The number of sacks and the time involved proved that several miners had been together in the theft, perhaps the very five that Ben said had been killed afterward.

One man might have had the patience to try a plan that meant years of waiting, but not several men.

Between the information Rouviere must possess and what Tarwater had

guessed, a man might be able to work out a pretty sound theory—if he could get all the facts from both of them. "Indian in the Big Stope . . . damnedest geezer . . ." Reeves should hire Tarwater to write the clues for the treasure hunt.

When he reached Sylvanite he went directly to the Fire Horse. Ben Liggett hadn't changed clothes. He was sitting at the long table in the barroom, his big brown-mottled hands clasped on the wood before him.

"Deedee all right?" Sadar asked.

Ben raised heavy brows. "He got in and out of that outdoor shower of his. Any man that can do that is healthy."

Sadar sat down on the table corner. "What did you warn me about, Ben?"

Ben's slate eyes regarded Sadar gloomily. "I said I might have been wrong. I still say it. Maybe I was only guessing."

"Who did you warn me about?"

Ben shook his big head slowly.

"Did you know a Vivandiere miner named Jason Mell?"

"Jason Mell . . . God! That's a long time ago. Funny thing about Jason. Most everybody blamed the operators for killing him, but there was a story that Mell and a trammer from the Viv was killed by the Hibe miners who robbed the vug—before they got knocked over themselves. If you can make any sense out of that, you're welcome to it."

"What about a geezer of an Indian at the Big Stope?"

Ben gave him a blank look. "There was a wooden Indian there years ago. What are you trying to get at?"

"I'll be damned if I know," Sadar said in disgust.

"Where'd you get the Indian business?"

"Sim. He told me a few things that mixed me up worse than ever."

Ben nodded. "Sim's like that when he gets to talking fast. His words get all twisted when he thinks of those toughs blowed up in the barracks at night. It's enough to give a man bad thoughts."

Sadar glanced at ancient pictures, feeling the impact of the past in them and Ben's heavy manner. He knew he'd been stirring bad memories, thrusting at old hurts ever since he'd been in Sylvanite. But he had to jab and probe—or else make poor guesses. He studied Liggett's broad face for a long time.

"Who was on the other detonator box—the one that did the job?" Sadar asked.

Ben's slate eyes were inscrutable. "Me."

Silence ran as dead as when a man stands in a mine until his ears hear sounds that are not there. That he had been the agent to make old ghosts writhe and show their teeth Sadar could not deny. That it had to be so he regretted.

Suddenly he realized he had heard no noise from the casino. That poker game was just another of the fragments that fitted nowhere, yet helped tangle his thinking. He asked about the Swede.

"Jammer's got a little ranch down the river. I think the whole gang is down there fishing today. Winters he goes to Arizona or some place where it's warm."

"For a high-country ranch income that isn't bad."

Liggett made slow card-dealing motions. "Slickers see that dumb face and beg him to get in—the first time."

Sadar began to see bright light about Jammer Roos and the odd poker game, but it wasn't light that led toward twenty-seven sacks of calaverite resting in the dark of Sylvan Mountain.

He left the long room with its dark furniture and pictures and heavy figure sitting at the table. Ben's eyes were on his hands and his face was solemn with hindsight of ancient things when Sadar closed the door.

His fourth day was almost gone. The thought didn't trouble him as much as it would have two days before.

CHAPTER XIV

A BIG DEAL

BACK at the Big Stope he showered and changed clothes and decided to follow the Indian lead, fantastic as it was.

After dinner he found Jackie Rouviere and chubby Myra lolling in the red jeep just beyond the brightest area of light thrown by the carbide lamps under the marquee.

Myra grinned at him impudently. "We were a little late today, but we promise to be on time to save you from future jams."

Sadar grinned. "You did well enough the first time."

He looked at Jackie. There was a marked resemblance between her eyes and Rouviere's, but the exact way of describing it was hard to fix. Her hair, he decided, was the same rich brown as her father's.

"What's wrong with my face?" Myra asked.

"I've seen it too many times already on postoffice walls," Sadar told her with a grin.

"He's doing better, Jackie," Myra said critically. "The night he got his beard yanked all he could do was ogle like a trout watching a minnow he couldn't get." She offered Sadar a cigarette. "Naturally, you don't know that Jackie talked her old man out of suing the pants off you and Deedee for malicious destruction of property, endangering lives, washing out bridle paths, spoiling natural beauty—"

"Stool pigeon!" Jackie said.

"You could see a rosy blush if the light was good," Myra said. "Of course, she did it all for Deedee. You just happened to fall under the protecting mantle." She sighed lugubriously. "I wish I could lure somebody into my powerhouse so gently. I'm considering little Sim Tarwater—if I can only get him away from that lion for a few minutes."

Jackie laughed. "Myra's mother was marked by a phonograph! Pay no attention."

"What a perfectly Victorian idea!" Myra giggled. "Biff can have Pete Dill use it in his advertising."

"Speaking of Sim Tarwater," Sadar said to Jackie, "did you know you and your dad scared him into the woods right in the middle of a big deal with me?"

He couldn't be sure of Jackie's expression, even though he leaned toward her a little. "I didn't know we scared him off, but Dad knew you were in the cabin. He saw you strike up the hill this morning when he was getting up. Of course, your big, fresh tracks in the dew didn't hurt any, either."

"He grabbed his bow and arrows and ran," Sadar said.

"Don't let that throw you off," Jackie said. "Sim carries that bow and his quiver like some men wear a wrist watch."

That might be, Sadar thought. But little Sim had been without his equipment the night Sadar had met him on the deserted street—unless it was cached somewhere nearby.

"While we're in the bow and arrow department, what can you tell me about a geezer of an Indian here in the hotel?" Sadar asked casually.

"I saw a geezer once in Yellowstone," Myra giggled.

Jackie's voice held curious tension when she said, "Yes, there's a cigar store Indian around the hotel some place. How could that possibly interest you?"

"He's a squawman," Myra said. "Or is that gilded thing in the basement a buck?"

Sadar said nothing, still watching Jackie's face. She was the only one he had questioned about the Indian subject who had reacted beyond being puzzled.

"Are you looking for calaverite—or what?" Jackie asked.

"Calaverite," Sadar said. "I'll see you later."

"Just for a painted dummy he left us," Myra mourned as Sadar walked toward the hotel.

At the timbers just inside the doorway Sadar met Reeves, who bobbed his red beard curtly and would have passed without a word if Sadar hadn't moved carelessly to block him.

Reeves' eyes tightened at the corner. Reddish glints leaped in them.

"What was the rest of that deal you were about to make the other day?" Sadar asked. "I've been wondering."

"Deal?" Reeves affected surprise. "I hired you as a ski instructor. Mr. Rouviere pointed out my error and sober reflection showed me he was right. That is as far as any 'deal' went, Sadar. My only interest in you now is as a guest of the hotel. If you have any complaints or suggestions tell the clerk."

"You mentioned the maps of the Vivandiere levels. How did they tie up with skiing, Reeves?"

"In the course of the conversation that might have slipped in some way. At any rate, I've had the maps locked up and made unavailable to unauthorized personnel."

"You read too many signs during the war, I see."

REEVES smiled coldly. He brushed past Sadar and went out of the hotel. Sadar watched him cross the walk and stop near the jeep. He said something to the girls, then glanced back toward Sadar with a mocking smile.

Sadar hated him more than ever then.

Reeves had changed his mind fast enough, not because of anything Rouviere might have said. Right at the Commander portal the red-bearded man had come to the conclusion that Sadar didn't know a thing about the calaverite and was prowling aimlessly. That was sure in Sadar's mind. Not so sure was the speculation concerning how much Reeves knew.

At the desk Terry and Gary were on him like flies on a sweating horse. They pestered him with questions and mixed in their own adventures on the raft until he picked them both up by the pants and threatened to knock their heads together.

"Do it! Go ahead!" one said. "Mine's the hardest."

He put the boys down and grinned at Al. The bellhops scampered for the door when car lights struck the windows. One managed to trip the other so that he did a belly slide for ten feet on the waxed linoleum tile.

Al grinned. "I don't know whether I could stand more than two weeks of those outlaws, but you got to admit they're genuine."

"Who put the maps in the office safe the other day?" Sadar asked casually.

Al's quick look showed that he recognized a good guess when he saw one. "Rouviere," he said.

Sadar felt mildly pleased with himself for having guessed that Reeves had lied. Being a man constitutionally opposed to having his importance lessened, Reeves had taken credit for Rouviere's move. The incident proved that the millionaire didn't trust Reeves concerning the high-grade, at least not since Sadar's arrival.

That was all it proved. I'm nibbling at the edges, Sadar thought, but I can't get a solid bite at anything.

He swung his eyes around the lobby. Mrs. Mahogany was emerging from the dining-room, conning the horizon for a lover of things Victorian or someone to convert to that condition. Terry and Gary were grunting through the street entrance under the luggage of a middle-aged couple who looked tired and ready to complain about something in advance. Sadar looked back at Mrs. Mahogany, estimating prospects of clearance if he stayed at the desk long enough to ask Al about the Indian.

Then he saw something that washed the question out of his mind. Jack Ralston and Rouviere were just rising from a table in the dining-room. There, Sadar thought, is the hatching of a deal I'd like to know about!

His speculative hesitation cost dearly. Mrs. Mahogany went into overdrive and engulfed him with a delighted "Well! Mr. Sadar!" just as the guests arrived at the desk.

There wasn't room for Terry and Gary, dropping bags slyly on each other's feet; the middle-aged couple sniffing suspiciously as if to detect the smell of cooking cauliflower; and Sadar surrounded by Mrs. Mahogany. As she steered him toward chairs near a spindly table he decided sourly that there wasn't room in the entire lobby for just Mrs. Mahogany. She needed a nice desert island.

"My dear Mr. Sadar, you must tell me all about the exciting flood. It made the most terrible roar all over town. I was talking to old Mr. Owen—he comes here for his hay fever every year, you know—and I was just saying to him . . ." She demonstrated copiously.

He got in an occasionally polite, "Is that so?" during the next five minutes. Rouviere and Ralston went by and started up the mahogany stairway, Ralston pausing an instant to bend a bitter look on Sadar. The man was, Sadar observed, without his gun at the moment. At least it wasn't in his hip pocket. Terry and Gary returned to the desk, their faces indicating satisfactory exchange of coin had been made.

Mrs. Mahogany had gone through a flood in China and was treating Sadar to the same. She veered to Mr. Owen's hay fever, the prevalence of ulcers among professional people and paused a moment to check her steam gauges.

In that moment of astounding silence Terry or Gary sliced in neatly. "There's a gent in the gents' room to see you, Mr. Sadar."

Sadar rose quickly.

"You never did tell me how you got out of that terrible mine!" Mrs. Mahogany protested.

"We each seized a piece of timber," Sadar said solemnly. "The water took us at fearful speed down the tunnel. There was nothing but a big roar and darkness, a whole lot of darkness. The thumping of our skulls against solid granite sounded like overripe watermelons dropping from trees. Then—then—I forget—everything went black!"

Mrs. Mahogany squealed delightedly. "You know I had a cousin who used to do the most humorous recitations about—"

"This gent's in an awful hurry!" the bellhop warned.

Sadar excused himself. The bellhop was left at the post but rallied quickly. "Watermelons don't grow on trees," he reproved when he caught up.

The men's lounge was empty. Sadar looked questioningly at Terry or Gary.

"Didn't you want to get away from her?" the boy asked.

Sadar grinned and produced a dollar. "You'll go far in this business," he said.

"Thanks. Old P.T.F. only gives me a half a buck, but I have to rescue him oftener, so I guess that ain't bad."

"Where is the wooden Indian that used to be in the lobby?"

"That crummy thing?" The bellhop gave Sadar directions on where to find it in the basement.

He followed the lad's directions, used a screen of diners emerging from the big room on his right to bypass Mrs. Mahogany, went through the dining-room and used a side entrance to reach a hall beyond.

He went through a dusty storeroom and reached the head of wooden stairs. Light sprang when he turned a switch. It wasn't much light he saw when he reached a musty basement where sat an antique furnace that surely hadn't overheated guests in the old days.

Old furniture, trestles, dusty canvas, coils of used wiring, packing cases and barrels of God-knows-what were stacked along both long walls as neatly as the heterogenous shapes of the items would allow. Just inside the room, in the left-hand corner, long rolls of old rugs with frayed ends leaned against the wall in middle-sagged postures.

He went to the end of the room, where the bellhop had said the wooden Indian was stored.

There was no carved figure. He worked both sides of the room, peering between furniture legs and behind barrels. Fifteen minutes later he was convinced there was no cigar store Indian in the basement, unless it had been sawed in sections and put in packing cases, or was jammed in the corner behind the rugs.

He went toward the rugs.

The automatic pistol that jabbed out from between two gray rolls looked as venomous as the steady poise of a rattlesnake's head.

"Don't get excited," someone said.

(End of Part III)

(Continued from page 8)

reconciled to, or at least rejoined, his family. Also at the same time it was said that he had been received back as pastor of the same church that had defrocked him. Beyond this now but vague memory I know nothing about him.

And the following from a Canadian reader—

He was born in the sunny southland where brooks and rivers run musically through the luxuriant land; where the magnolia grandiflora, like white stars, glow in a firmament of green; where crystal lakes dot the greensward and the softest summer breezes dimple the wave lips into kisses for the lilies on the shore; where the air is resonant with the warbled melody of a thousand sweet-voiced birds and redolent of the perfume of many flowers. This was the beginning. . .

Several times through the years I have read in the pages of *Adventure* those words contained in an article entitled "Riley Grannan's Last Adventure." Imagine my delight when quite recently, while doing a little research in the morgue of one of our daily papers, I came across a short account of a visit this celebrated gentleman paid to Gravesend race track while on a trip to England in May, 1899.

Two horses, Henry of Navarre and Domino, were running in a matched race. On the spur of the moment Grannan weighed in as a bookmaker and announced that he was willing to lay odds on Domino to win. While the crowd didn't know how much he was worth they were willing to take him and the money began to roll in. Grannan took it as quietly as if he were the cashier in a bank and the crowd in front of him depositors. The race was a dead heat and for his share Grannan collected $12,000.

On a trip to Newmarket, Grannan startled the English bookmakers by winning £25,000 ($125,000) on the first race. Again in a little over an hour he won $150,000, and promptly turned around and lost it on a wild bet.

The final analysis of Riley Grannan as reported is quite interesting.

"Riley Grannan, plunger, is certainly a remarkable man. His nerves must be thin fabrics of steel. His heart must be made of armour plate fastened with steel rivets. His brain must be entirely devoid of any portion of grey matter which would make him susceptible to emotion.

"What manner of man is this plunger who can by successful speculation on the races roll up a fortune of $150,000 in little over an hour, and then coolly place that entire amount on another race and lose it without the quiver of an eyelash? Nine out of ten ordinary citizens would drop dead, but Grannan has absolutely no conception of money except as a medium to bet.

"Grannan doesn't look the part of a plunger. He is tall but slender. He is not handsome from any point of view, his features are too sharp and too irregular. In short he is decidedly homely.

"He dresses quietly and he lives plainly. A modest man, Grannan can never be accused of boasting. He is always cool. About the only exhibition of nervousness ever noted about him is his habit of toying with his watch chain.

"His career as a plunger has been along meteoric lines. Others of his ilk have skyrocketed to fame, only to go broke and disappear. Not Grannan. A flash, a bright display, and then a charred stick, only to bob up again with some other astonishing feat."

. . . He died in Rawhide, where in winter the shoulders of the mountains are wrapped in garments of ice, and in summer the blistering rays of the sun beat down on the skeleton ribs of the desert . . .

Never having read, or heard, of him outside of the pages of our magazine I was delighted to find those few notes on his trip to England, and particularly his description.

Sincerely,

—Allan Matthews
66 Front St.,
Hull, Quebec,
Canada.

Any other old Grannan friends or fans who care to add anything to his portrait?

And can anyone tell us what Knickerbocker's later life brought him? We'd be mighty grateful to any long-memoried reader who could help round out the picture.

JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, our *Ask Adventure* fresh water angling expert, has just sent us a copy of his 1948 Solunar Tables, those remarkable aids to the fishing fraternity which we wouldn't be caught on a trout stream without come opening day. And, now we think of it, by the time this issue reaches the newsstand opening day will have came and went. Tight lines and full creels, brothers!—K.S.W.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

THE Great White Sands.

Query:—What can you tell me about the the White Sands National Monument? I've written to the curator there, but he has been of little help. Exactly what I am interested in is this:

(1) Brief history.
(2) Minerals found there and uses if any.
(3) Has anyone been known to get lost in it?
(4) Are there any other such deposits in the States, and are there any in foreign countries that compare with it?

—Ferris M. Weddle
Route 1,
Boise, Idaho

Reply by H. F. Robinson:—Just off of Highway 70, near the town of Alamogordo, lies what is considered one of the strangest phenomena, what is now a National Monument, the Great White Sands stretching along a thirty mile front and covering 176, 000 acres. These sands, drifting and changing with the high winds into high dunes and fantastic shapes, are almost pure gypsum. It is because this area is so unlike anything else in the world that the United States Government has set it aside as a National Monument, and built headquarters offices, a museum and restroom.

This area is just west of the San Andreas Mountains, along the base of which are large deposits of gypsum. Where it is in place it is in translucent lumps and sheets, and in the early days thin sheets were quarried out and used in place of window glass. When it is exposed to the air it disintegrates and becomes white, and often, in places, looks very much like tiny homeopathic pills.

Being a mass of pure gypsum, there can be found no other minerals in the area. It (the gypsum) is used in plaster, and with heating and grinding it is a perfect "plaster of Paris."

I have never heard of anyone getting lost in the sands, as the area is not large, and the mountains to the east are in plain sight.

As I have heretofore intimated, so far as I know there is nothing of similar nature any place else in the world.

PURSER-Pharmacist's Mates in the Merchant Marine.

Query:—Several years ago the U. S. Maritime Commission attempted to recruit ex-Navy Pharmacist's Mates for Assistant Pursers. Can you tell me if such a program is still in effect and, if so, where can I obtain information on the duties, pay etc. of that position? I understand that there may be shore stations where hospital corpsmen are used. Any information will be greatly appreciated.

—Wayne H. Mahanna
1708 21st St.,
Des Moines, Iowa.

Reply by Kermit W. Salyer:—At present there is no training being offered for a beginner as Purser-Pharmacist's Mate in the U. S. Merchant Marine. The only enrollees being accepted in this department are those who possess a Certificate of Registry as Junior Assistant Purser-Pharmacist's Mate or higher and with service at sea as such, provided the holder of such a certificate also meets the general requirements. In other words, the present course given by the U. S. Maritime Service is a refresher course. But since you served in the Navy as a Pharmacist's Mate it might be possible that you would be acceptable for further training. With this in mind, below is a general outline of the course and requirements.

The objectives of the training is to provide qualified Purser-Pharmacist's Mates with a course of instruction intended as a review of knowledge, duties, and responsibilities essential for competent and well-qualified Purser-Pharmacist's Mates aboard modern merchant ships, with specialized instruction in those subjects in which the individual student is most in need.

The course of training is sufficiently flexible to permit instruction and project work in subjects requested by any shipping company or by the student himself providing that such subjects are pertinent to shipboard duties. Regular classes will be scheduled covering the latest procedures and techniques in both the purser and hospital corps fields. Students deficient in purser's subjects may spend more time on purser's subjects and students deficient in pharmacist's mate's subjects may spend more time on subjects relative to that field.

The general requirements are: (a) Minimum of 8 months (240 days) sea service during the 12 months preceding date of enrollment or recall for training. (b) Eight months interval since previous training at a U. S. Maritime Service Training Station. (c) Statement certifying applicant's intention to continue to serve in the U. S. Merchant Marine for one year upon completion of training. (d) No active communicable diseases at time of application.

The Maritime Commission says that to "make this training available to the greatest number of men for the funds available, it has become necessary to establish a basic rate of pay for the students in training of $150.00 per month for officers and $100.00 per month for unlicensed men. Quarters and meals are available at the station at no cost to the student. Students may live off the station if they desire, but no reimbursement will be made for quarters and subsistence.

"Applicants for training on the West Coast are accepted at the U. S. Maritime Service Enrolling Office in San Francisco. Applicants for training at Sheepshead Bay, Long Island, New York, are accepted at the U. S. Maritime Service Enrolling Office at 17 Trinity Place, New York City."

The course is of two months' duration and the subjects covered will probably include what you have already studied as a Navy Pharmacist's Mate in addition to the subjects needed by a purser, such as general ship's business, making up a payroll, customs declarations, etc.

The duties of a Purser-Pharmacist's Mate aboard the modern merchant ship include medical care of the entire crew (40-50 men), complete handling of ship's business under supervision of the captain, and conduct of the Slop Chest (ship's store). The pay runs from $267.50 per month on tankers to a little less on cargo ships and a little more on passenger ships.

Inasmuch as you do not have a Certificate of Registry as Junior Assistant Purser-Pharmacist's Mate, but have had service as a Pharmacist's Mate in the Navy, I suggest that you write to Washington for a clarification of your status regarding Maritime Service, National Theatre Building, Washington 25, D. C. May I suggest that you state your case clearly, and the best of luck to you. We need good Purser-Pharmacist's Mates out here on the ships now.

A SHOTGUN for a wildlife lady.

Query:—During the school year I am employed at the University of Michigan in the School of Forestry and Conservation where I assist in teaching the courses in wildlife management and have supervision of all the work pertaining to waterfowl. In the summer I have been working for the Fish and Wildlife Service at the Seney Wildlife Refuge where I am engaged in working on various problems relating to use of the area by waterfowl. At both places I have been very much handicapped by my lack of a suitable shotgun.

One of the objectives of our School of Forestry has been to build up a collection of the species of duck indigenous to Michigan for our students to use. This project has suffered badly because I have had to rely on borrowed guns which are neither too plentiful nor, when offered, too satisfactory. We have tried to teach our students the proper use of waterfowl as a source of sport. Here again I have been at a considerable handicap without a gun.

During this past summer I have been working again under the same difficulty. It would have been highly desirable for me to obtain duck specimens in various phases of plumage change for a Refuge reference collection. Just the other day I discovered a female Green-winged Teal with two half-grown young. According to the Check List of the Birds of Michigan issued by Dr. J. Van Tyne of the University of Michigan Museum there is no breeding record for this species for this state. It was highly imperative, therefore, that I secure one of the young to substantiate my observation, but again without a gun I was helpless.

I could have purchased a number of guns of mediocre workmanship during the past two years, but I am determined to have a good one—one of which I can expect A-1 performance and of which I can be justly proud. This—to me—means a 16 double-barreled shotgun, full and modified choke, 28" barrel. Perhaps—being only a woman—I am not correct in my analysis of my gun needs. I should, therefore, welcome any suggestions that you might have to make concerning a proper weapon for my purposes as outlined above.

—Elizabeth B. Beard
Seney Wildlife Refuge,
Germfask, Michigan.

Reply by Roy S. Tinney:—I am delighted to know you prefer a double, the type of gun I was taught to regard as the proper weapon for a sportsman.

As to quality and performance there is nothing to choose between the standard makes, such as L. C. Smith, Parker, Fox, Ithaca or Winchester. It is merely a matter of locating a gun that suits you: gauge, weight, balance and stock dimensions.

A stock that really fits you is just as important as the sights on a rifle.

My experience indicates a woman will get far more ducks with a light handy gun, one she can bring into action easily and quickly. It is a bad mistake to burden her with a ten-bore Magnum that, sooner or later, is sure to bruise her shoulder and give her an acute attack of flinching, a handicap very hard to overcome.

A pair of *twenty-six inch barrels* will shoot just as well as those measuring twenty-eight or more.

By avoiding the Super-X High Speed shells, the weight of the gun can be reduced to about six-and-one-half pounds.

Either a 12 or 16-gauge will serve you well. The 16 is better for the commercial shells; the 12 a bit more effective with a 16-gauge load of an ounce of shot, a difference too slight to be noticed in the field. Long ago learned I can get more ducks with No. 6 shot than any other size, in guns of 12 gauge or smaller.

I urge you to select a light, handy, upland gun you can use comfortably under all conditions. Do not let the lusty cannoneers lead you astray.

When you have learned to hit flying ducks with a due degree of regularity at thirty to forty yards, you will be a very competent wing shot.

Not one hunter in a hundred will bag more ducks than you do.

Next time you visit a sporting goods store, look at the single-barrel guns made by Winchester costing twixt fifteen and twenty dollars. Once upon a time, I had three: a 12, a 20 and a 28-gauge. All were gradually wangled away from me by boys I made realize that rifle shooting is an exact science, but wing shooting is a fine art. Found the 20-gauge Winchester single to be the best little utility gun I ever owned. Use Skeet shells loaded with No. 9 shot and it is just-what-the-doctor-ordered for obtaining specimens. I regard the 28-gauge as ideal, but the shells are not easily obtained and a .410 is inadequate.

My pet quail gun, the most used of all my battery of bang-sticks, is a 28-bore, single-barrel, muzzleloading, cap-lock fowling piece made about 75 years ago. Can load it to suit conditions as I find them and others are always surprised to find how easily and how quickly I can reload. For instruction and practice, I find the single barrel ideal, teaches one to score a direct hit with the first shot.

My neighbor here on Newcomb Creek raises Mallards and Wild Geese and I ride herd on them when he is busy in Baltimore; battle their enemies with a Sheridan air rifle, deadly up to fifty feet, yet it does not endanger stock or enrage the farmers laboring in adjoining fields. The .22 long rifle cartridge has too much range and more power than I need. I "rise to maintain" vermin shooting is an ideal year 'round sport, that guns can and should be used to conserve our fast dwindling wild life.

ITEM: If possible locate a shotgun having a stock that fits you; then carefully note the dimensions on one of the charts provided by the sporting goods stores.

Wish I were able to help you teach the youngsters the "true religion" — having reached a point where I would much rather observe and admire our game birds than shoot at them.

SWORDPLAY for fun.

Query:—Can you give me the correct name and address of any fencing organization in this country?

Is there much fencing in the Italian school in the United States?

Are there any fencing journals published in this country?

—Bruce L. Hanson
Northorne, Minn.

Reply by Col. Jean V. Grombach:—The Amateur Fencers League of America's address is Room 3406, Chanin Building, New York 17, New York. That is the executive office and the office of the President, Mr. Dernell Every.

Yes, a large number of foil men and quite a few épée men in the U. S. employ what is known as the Italian school and many use the so-called Italian foil and Italian épée. The strict and absolute Italian school cross bar, strapped wrist, classical style, however, is of course in decreasing minority.

There have been a number of fencing books and manuals written and published in the United States by A. G. Spalding, American Sports Library, A. S. Barnes, the A.F.L.A. and others. There have been from time to time efforts to publish a fencing magazine or journal, but none have stuck. There is, however, a journal, or more properly speaking, a house organ of the A.F.L.A. called the Riposte which I believe is still published and can be subscribed to by sending $1.00 to the President, A.F.L.A. at the address given in the answer to your first question.

Public libraries will, I believe, give you most of the manuals and books on the subject published in this country in the last few years.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

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SPORTS AND HOBBIES

American Folklore and Legend: *Songs, dances, regional customs; African survivals, religious sects; voodoo*—HAROLD PREECE, c/o *Adventure.*

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, c/o *Adventure.*

Auto Racing—WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT, 4828 N. Elkhart Ave., Milwaukee 11, Wis.

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, c/o *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Mattawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Boxing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, c/o *Adventure.*

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask, Canada.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th, N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, c/o *Adventure.*

Fencing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, c/o *Adventure.*

Fishing, Fresh water: *Fly and bait casting; bait camping outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, c/o *Adventure.*

Fly and Bait Casting Tournaments—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Hiking—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, c/o *Adventure.*

Horses and Horsemanship—JOHN RICHARD YOUNG, Timberlane Farm, R 2—Box 364, Racine, Wis.

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, c/o *Adventure.*

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *American and Foreign*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns: *American and foreign, wing shooting and field trials*—ROY S. TINNEY, Brielle, N. J.

Skiing—WILLIAM C. CLAPP, The Mountain Book Shop, North Conway, N. H.

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York, Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, c/o *Adventure.*

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America, Prospectors' outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, c/o *Adventure.*

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, c/o *Adventure.*

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling: HAPSBURG LIEBE, c/o *Adventure.*

Sunken Treasure: *Treasure ships; deep sea diving; salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIESEBERG, c/o *Adventure.*

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 14 N. Burnett St., East Orange, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

United States Army—COL. R. G. EMERY, U.S.A. Ret., c/o *Adventure.*

United States Coast Guard—LIEUT. C. B. LEMON, U.S.C.G., Ret., Box 221, Equinunk, Wayne Co., Penna.

United States Marine Corps—MAJ. ROBERT H. RANKIN, U.S.M.C.R., c/o *Adventure.*

United States Navy—LIEUT. DURAND KIEFER, U.S.N., Ret., Box 74, Del Mar, Calif.

Merchant Marine—KERMIT W. SALYER, c/o *Adventure.*

Military Aviation—O. B. MYERS, c/o *Adventure.*

Federal Investigation Activities—*Secret Service, Immigration, Customs, Border Patrol, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, c/o *Adventure.*

The French Foreign Legion—GEORGES SURDEZ, c/o *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, c/o *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

★New Guinea—L. P. B. ARMIT, c/o *Adventure.*

★New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley, N. S. W., Australia.

Hawaii—CARL J. KUNZ, c/o *Adventure.*

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya*—GORDON MACCREAGH, c/o *Adventure.* **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, c/o *Adventure.* **4** *Bechuanaland, Southern Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, c/o *Adventure.* **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

★Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon*—V. B. WINDEL, c/o *Adventure.* **2** *Persia, Arabia*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, c/o *Adventure.* **3** ★*Palestine*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

Europe, Part 1 ★*The British Isles*—THOMAS BOWEN PARTINGTON, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., London, W. C. 2, England.

★Central America—ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, Classificador 466, Santiago, Chile.

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile*—EDGAR YOUNG, c/o *Adventure.* **2** ★*Argentina*—ALLISON WILLIAMS BUNKLEY, c/o *Adventure.* **3** ★*Brazil*—ARTHUR J. BURKS, c/o Alto Tapajos, Rua Gaspar Viana 18, Belem, Para, Brazil.

West Indies—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, c/o *Adventure.*

Baffinland and Greenland—VICTOR SHAW, c/o *Adventure.*

Labrador—WILMOT T. DEBELL, c/o *Adventure.*

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. **2** *Quintana Roo, Yucatan, Campeche*—CAPTAIN W. RUSSELL SHEETS, c/o *Adventure.* **3** ★*West Coast beginning with State of Sinaloa; Central and Southern Mexico, including Tabasco and Chiapas*—WALLACE MONTGOMERY, Club Americano, Bolivar 31, Mexico, D.F.

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NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of James Mandow, please write to S. E. Purington, 57 Exchange St., Portland 3, Maine. The last time I heard from him was in 1945. He was in the army stationed in Japan and before that he was living in New York.

Anybody who knows Raymond F. Miller, U.S. C.G., 13th or Juneau District, Nome, Alaska, Box 281 (his last known address), please contact R. V. Webster, 1020 Post St., San Francisco 9, Calif. Miller's hobby is photography and he had a friend in Galveston, Texas, by the name of Elton W. Yancy.

Please address C. B. Stroud, Coral Ridge, Ky., Rt. No. 1, if you know anything about the following: An American flyer landed near Hohen Kemnath, Germany, April 9, 1945, and was taken to the hospital in Kastl suffering with a bullet wound in leg and burns on hands, arms, and face. About April 20, '45, he was moved to the second floor of the hospital at Amberg. About four days later an American lt. col. arrived in a jeep and talked to the wounded man. Two days after that he was taken by ambulance to an American hospital. Dr. Wilhelm Schmidt was in charge of one of the German hospitals. Lt. John D. Stroud, my son, has not been heard of since that time.

I will greatly appreciate contacting any of the following named men who were members of Troop D, 3rd U. S. Cavalry, stationed at Fort Assiniboine, Montana, in the years 1903-1933—1st Lieut. Reginald McNally (Com.), Sgt. Carl G. Day, Sgt. Lawrence Creekhaven, Egbert Ward, Corp. Nicholas Nusbaum, Thurston Thickston (Hosp. Corps), Pvt. Clyde R. Hess, Sam Standley, Clyde H. Shelmester, Ben C. Parrar or any other member of the above outfit. I hope to obtain information needed by the V.A. from the above. Please write Charles M. W. Burden, Box 128, Eddyville, Ky.

I would like to contact anyone who served on the LST 1033 during the time she was first commissioned until V-J day. H. L. Martin, Box 66, Ashland, W. Va.

I want address or information of my son, William (Bill) Andrew Clow; born at Carmen, Okla., Oct. 16, 1920. He is slightly deaf. Last heard of March 14, 1938, at Bellefontaine, Ohio. Said he was on way to Boston. He lived at Cleo Springs, Okla., and El Centro, Calif., and towns in Arkansas. Please write Earl Clow, P.O. Box 684, Oklahoma City, Okla.

Will someone who was in Jap prison in Java from 1942 to 1944 who, perhaps, knew Seaman Moody C. Harrison, please write me. He was presumed to be lost when the Japs were moving him from Java in 1944. The ship was sunk by allies. C. L. Kitchens, 12 Maurice Ave., Simonsdale, Portsmouth, Va.

I would like to locate my father, Dewey Chaves Shiver, born March 28, 1901, at Lincoln, New Mexico. Has not been heard from since August, 1930. He has lived in San Francisco, El Paso, and Florida. In El Paso, he lived on Cotton, Erie, and Copper streets. He was in the Navy in 1917-1921, enlisting at Roswell, New Mexico. Please get in touch with Bill Shiver, Box 818, Oklahoma City, Okla.

P. J. Ferriere, Box 163, Commack, N. Y., wants to hear from any surviving crew members of the U.S.S. *West Over*, Army Cargo and Supply ship, which was torpedoed and sunk in the Bay of Biscay on or about July 21st, 1918.

I am anxious to contact my uncle, John Dunlop, native of Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia. He is of medium height, gray hair, and in his middle fifties, probably a salesman or an accountant. He was last seen in Boston, Mass., in 1926. Charles Dunlop, 63 Pleasant St., Truro, Nova Scotia.

I would like to contact my buddy, Herbert C. Summers. We soldiered together with Co. C., 393rd Inf., 99 Div. I last saw him during the Battle of the Bulge, Dec. 16, 1944. His home is somewhere in Charleston, W. Virginia. Anyone knowing him please contact George O. Parker, 250 Columbia St., Cumberland, Md.

I am very interested in locating the following buddies of mine. We served in the 26th Regt., First Inf. Div., both in the states and the ETO; in England, Scotland, North Africa, and Sicily, where we were separated. S/Sgt. John Page, about 5′ 7″, 140 lbs., ruddy complexion, reddish brown wavy hair, square features, and about 33 years of age. Page is formerly of Jersey City, N. J. Sgt. George (Big George) Brighindi, 6′ 1″, 200 lbs., olive complexion, black wavy hair, plays guitar. He is from Bridgeport, Conn., about 29. T/Sgt. Arthur (Lippy) Lippman, dark complexion, black thinning wavy hair, about 5′ 6″, slender build, from New York City, is about 32 years old. Any information will be appreciated by Danny Monahan, 354 Water St., Leominster, Mass.

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I would like to inquire about William Breese, Paul Dees, and Jakie Marlow with whom I served in the 12th Photo Section, France Field, Canal Zone. Please contact James C. Long, San. Eng., N. J. State Hospital, Greystone Park, N. J.

Roscoe Pinney, who served in the First World War with the 81st Toronto Battalion, wounded, gassed and shell-shocked, discharged June 1919 at Toronto. Last seen in Sheridan, Wyoming, in 1920. Supposed to have been in Youngstown, Ohio, in 1933. Anyone knowing his whereabouts please write his father, Guy C. Pinney, Sr., 490 Morningside St., North Long Beach, Calif.

Francis Charles Aitkens, R.C.A.F., would like news of John Dowrie (Mick) Roberts. He was born in Dublin about 1891, went overseas with the Canadian Artillery from Victoria October, 1915, and returned in 1921. He worked in Clinton, B.C., then was a storekeeper in Victoria. In 1926 he went to California where he worked at Petaluma. The last address was Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, in 1938. Please communicate with Sqdn. Ldr. F. C. Aitkens, Box L-160, R.M.D. 4, Victoria, B.C., Canada.

I am trying to locate my buddy, Norman Proper. He was on the *S. S. Minotaur, S. S. Matonian,* and the *S. S. Esso Baytown*. His home town is Denver, Colo., and he is 6′ 2″ tall, weighing about 165 lbs. He has brown hair. He was last heard of in Port Aransas, Texas. William Quinn, 3314 Waterloo Place, Dallas, Texas.

W. H. McCarty, 965 Clinton St., Napa, Calif., wants information of his two brothers, A. W. McCarty, whose nickname is "Buck," and W. F. McCarty, sometimes called "Bill."

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Arthur Micue or Matthews, please write N. F. Preo, 3000 S. Lawndale Ave., Chicago 23, Ill. He enlisted from Maine in the U. S. Army, served in Texas and Mexico with the cavalry against Villa about 1917-1918.

I would appreciate any help in finding George Van Denworker. He would be about 80 years old now. He raised my wife's father, George A. Van Denworker, along with three other boys, one of whom was his own. The family last heard from him in 1935 when he was in San Francisco. Please contact Laurence C. Buck, 317½ N. Maine St., Ellensburg, Washington.

Information wanted about Lt. Gene Manghi, O-1641540, 56th Signal Battalion, who wrote me from Czechoslovakia regarding my article on hybrid oak crop trees published in *Popular Science*, April, 1945. Any knowledge of him should be forwarded to Thomas Q. Mitchell, 1564 Broadway, New York, N. Y., c/o BILLBOARD.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of my son, Hercules McClain, veteran of World War I, last heard of at 519½ South Daley St., Los Angeles, Calif., engaged in landscape gardening at that time, 1932, please write to his brother, William D. Meeks, Apt. 1, 102 Palmetto Dr., Pasadena 4, Calif.

I want to contact Stephen Kolowski from Chicago who was on the Secretary of Navy's yacht and the Receiving Station in Washington. Also Joe Viediteh who was on the old Reuben James 245 in 1920—and William Jennings Bryan Guest from St. Louis who was on the old battleship, the New Jersey. Would also like to find William Wischehtch from the Naval Magazine in Coco Solo and Naval Air Station along with William Henry Hanna Hurst from New Orleans who was on the old Fhisser 289 in 1920. Please write L. W. Fraser, CGM, USN, 16th Fleet Staff, Orange, Tex.

I would appreciate any information about Frank and Fred Reed of New Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The last known of Frank, he was still in Pennsylvania and Fred was somewhere on the West Coast. Anyone knowing of either Frank's or Fred's whereabouts, please write to M. M. Mausser, R.F.D. No. 1, Bernard, Iowa.

I should like to locate Vernie Baldwin, 35 years old, lived in Live Oak and Jacksonville, Fla., in 1928 and early in the 30's. He is related to John Sterling and is the son of B. O. Baldwin. Please write J. E. Cross, P.O. Box 61, Live Oak, Fla.

I am very anxious to contact my old buddy, former S/Sgt. Harry Rogers. We served with the 491st Bomb. Group H. He may be in Biloxi, Miss., or Mobile, Ala. I have been trying since October, 1945, to find him and any help you may be able to give me will be appreciated. Please write to George Paraspolo, 627 29th St., San Francisco, Calif.

Will any soldier serving in Company A, 275th Engineers Bn., 75th Division, in Holland during the first part of 1944 who knew Cpl. F/5 Thomas L. Graham or Quentin Rall please write to Mrs. J. E. Graham, Artesia, New Mexico.

I would like to locate Ed La Vergue who was on the *USS Marblehead* at the time of her historic encounter with the Japanese. Please write J. O. Jernigan, 1014 W. Eastland Ave., Nashville, Tenn.

Can anyone help me find my brother-in-law, Anthony Ofsian? I last heard from him in 1943 when he sailed with the Merchant Marine. He usually sailed the Robin Lines as a cook or chief steward. His mother is very sick and is asking for him. Anyone having any information regarding Tony, please communicate with Joseph J. Machovic, 833 Abbott Court, Baltimore 2, Md.

I am anxious to contact Lt. Cal Newton, formerly of the 491st Post Battalion, Transportation Corps, formed at Indiantown Gap Military Reservation, Penna. Newton attended the Army Administrative Officer Candidate School No. 6 at State College, Mississippi, and is urged to contact Edwin F. Ficklen, Statler Hotel, 423 E. 7th St., Los Angeles 13, Calif.

For some time I have been trying to locate my father, George Franklin Watson. He was last known to be in Cleveland, Ohio. If any one has any information whatsoever about him, please write to G. F. Watson, 695 E. Utica St., Buffalo 11, N. Y.

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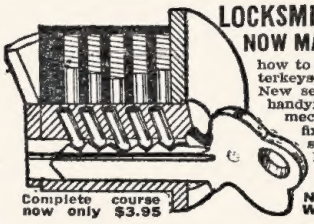

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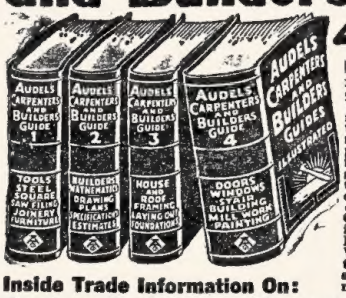
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CAT-TEX

SOLE OUT-WEARS LEATHER!

I am trying to locate some friends of mine whom I haven't seen since 1938. I don't remember their names, but I met them in the summer of 1936 when they were living in East Bennington, New Hampshire. There were about 12 or 14 in the family. They went to Antrim District School in 1937 and moved away about November of '37. They moved back in 1938 and then moved away again. They may be living in northern N. H. or Vt. The four of them that I knew would be between 14 and 18. If anyone has any information about them, please contact Francis R. DeCapot, 65 Amherst St., Nashua, N. H.

Paul "Duke" Byrnes, 934½ Forsythe St., Toledo, Ohio, would like to locate his old buddy, James "Sugar" Solyer with whom he worked in Nevada in '39. We worked together for five years with the Div. of Interior and his home town was Germantown, Ohio. His last known whereabouts was on the U.S.S. Sands, in New York Harbor in 1940. Any knowing his present locality, please write to Paul "Duke" Byrnes.

Will anyone who served with Corporal William Yarian, Company B, 297th Engineer (C) Battalion in France, please write to his mother, Mrs. H. Yarian, 28411 Rollcrest Road, Route 1, Farmington, Michigan.

I am trying to find my buddy, Arthur Von Boot, or Bot. We worked together for the Bell Telephone Company of Pennsylvania, in Pittsburgh, during the spring of 1902. He was a lineman and was headed for the southwestern gold fields. He knew me only by my nickname, "Si Perkins." Anyone knowing his present whereabouts, please write to H. H. Epler, 2102 Hollingsworth St., New Kensington, Penna.

W. G. Carter, General Delivery, Tucson, Ariz., wishes to locate Charles F. Head, about 59 years old, born in North Bay, Ontario, Canada. Would also like to find Ellsworth Head, adopted by Willis family at an early age. Charles and Ellsworth had another brother, Tom, and a sister, Leah. Would much appreciate any information concerning these people.

I would appreciate any information as to the whereabouts of Joseph R. Connolly, formerly of Westfield, N. J., who has lived in and around Los Angeles since the summer of 1938. He was drafted into the U. S. Army in the early part of World War II. He was in the Air Corps at Hamilton Field, California, and at Hammond Field, California. After being discharged he resided for a time in Los Angeles and later became a civilian employee at a U. S. Naval Construction Unit at Inyokern, California. His father died and I would like to get in touch with him. Please write to J. R. Cummings, 329a Arlington Ave., Jersey City, N. J.

Would greatly appreciate learning of the whereabouts of Harry (Gus) Stewart, Richard Donato and Sgt. Zimmer all at No. 2 Hospital, Det. Med. Dept., Fort Bragg, N. C. Stewart was from Philadelphia, Donato from New York and Zimmer from somewhere in the Middle West. All served in EENT, in 1942 and 1943. Dr. James O. Baxter, Jr., 1500 Front St., Beaufort, N. C.

TOP (L. TO R.): PETE REISER, BRUCE EDWARDS, EDDIE MIKSIS
BOTTOM (L. TO R.): RALPH BRANCA, DUKE SNIDER, CLYDE KING

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